

# Coon Rapids – White Rock Great Place Offer



"Bowman's Bottom" by local artist Nancy Thompson

In our great place the land and the river  
will tell their story.

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Coon Rapids is a forward-thinking, creative community. From our roots as a river and railroad town and later the home of the Garst & Thomas Seed Corn Company, we have moved forward to embrace the challenges of economic, social, and technological change. The town has a history of being innovative, quirky and inclusive. New ideas and new blood -including the increasing number of Latinos populating our community- are welcome here.

Coon Rapids' best asset is the dynamic leadership found in its main civic institutions: the City Council, Coon Rapids Municipal Utilities (CRMU), the Coon Rapids Development Group (CRDG), the city-owned Thomas Rest Haven, and the Coon Rapids-Bayard Community School District (CR-B). All these successful institutions are led by experienced professionals with an impressive track record of innovative, quality service.

That strong local leadership has now been joined by the vision and commitment of the Whiterock Conservancy Board which includes some of the top environmental leaders of the state: Mark Ackelson of Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Fred Kirshenmann of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Mike Brandrup of the DNR, Bob Riley of the Des Moines Waterworks, and Liz Garst of Coon Rapids. The Board will oversee the future of Whiterock Conservancy and its over 5000 acres of land being incrementally donated by the Garst Family. The Conservancy will support public-interest purposes including environmental restoration, research in sustainable agriculture, and public education and enjoyment.

That \$6 million land gift to the Conservancy comes on top of numerous other local investments in making Coon Rapids a great place. CRDG investment campaigns, Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and other community contributions have mobilized millions of dollars of local resources for community investments in elder care, recreational facilities, residential subdivisions, business development, and our schools.

Whiterock gives Coon Rapids great new potential as an ecotourism destination area. The enormous challenge and opportunity to develop the state-wide potential and importance of Whiterock is best shared between the local community and state, and involve the vision of the state's best experts. Early state support of this innovative public-private partnership will allow Whiterock and Coon Rapids to quickly come into their own as one of western Iowa's preeminent Great Places.

## **Our Vision**

The Coon Rapids-Whiterock Great Place is a regional hub that provides limitless opportunities for visitors and residents to choose their individual level of interaction with nature and tailor their experiences to their interests. The already rich recreational opportunities of the town of Coon Rapids (Aquatic Center, golf course, tennis courts, biking and walking trails), will be greatly enriched through the myriad recreational offers

of the Whiterock preserve: watchable wildlife, hiking, canoeing, trail riding, astronomy, etc. Add this to the growing number of creative ecotourism enterprises offering local tours, products of local artisans, and locally grown foods, and our combined offer makes Coon Rapids - Whiterock a unique destination and experience unparalleled in the state.

Our vision includes a thriving, inclusive community which is keeping its young people with good schools and good jobs, is growing in cultural and racial diversity, and is attracting former residents to return for their retirement years. Our social fabric is a vibrant web of dozens of social and service organizations which function in close coordination with school and city services, including the fire and ambulance departments, library, churches, and the city-owned Thomas Rest Haven. Coon Rapids is an ideal place to visit, live, and raise a family or retire in close contact with the authentic values of rural Iowa.

## **Opportunities**

### **Whiterock Start-Up Projects**

**2006-2007:** Initial signage, parking, sanitary facilities, and campsites enable the nonprofit Whiterock Conservancy to quickly open its main 4,300-acre tract to the general public.

**2006-2007** A 4-mile paved interpretive trail featuring fishing ponds, the historic Khrushchev visit house and restored wetlands connect to the Coon Rapids trail system and the Coon Rapids business district.

**2006-2007** Environmental inventories, the protection of remaining prairie remnants, and redesign of grazing pastures to enhance productivity while reducing the environmental degradation. These projects will lay the ground for future large-scale restoration efforts.

### **CRDG Rural Tourism Projects**

**2006-2010** Creative ecotourism businesses help make Whiterock an unrivaled destination area and boost area incomes and retail sales.

**2006-2008** Green Community planning helps protect and restore our greenways, parks, watershed and dark skies.

**2007-2010** Local and national trail connections to the east, north and southwest make Coon Rapids an important Iowa trail hub.

**2008-2010** A Coon Rapids Corn Museum connects us to our past, showcases two of our high-tech businesses, and serves as a Main Street destination spot.

### **Other Community Projects**

**2006-2008** A new bilingual CR-B school-community liaison improves school community relations, with a special focus on Latino integration.

**2007-2008** Our award-winning Thomas Rest Haven expands options for aging in place with independent and assisted living facilities, respite care, dementia care, and home care options.

**2008-2010** New city emergency facilities enable our community fire fighters and EMT volunteers to respond to increases in outdoor recreation tourism and prairie burns.



## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **WELCOME**

Wow! Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack's Iowa Great Places Initiative has sparked and channeled enthusiasm here in an unprecedented way! Great Places has encouraged our leaders to reach out to our community and focus on something incredibly unique and timely!

One year ago, the Coon Rapids Development Group had its 5<sup>th</sup> Ave Beautification grant approved, our Mayor was preparing plans for a new community shelter house, and the CRDG Trails Committee was hoping the state would fund REAP again so we could apply for funds to build another extension to our trail system.

At about the same time, members of the Garst family were finalizing plans to gift a huge expanse of extraordinary Iowa land and create Whiterock Conservancy, thus establishing a vast area dedicated to restoration, sustainable agricultural research, citizen education and low impact public use. While the size of the gift was incomparable, more unique was the family's wish that the Conservancy be governed by a non-profit board of directors and an intriguing vision of multipurpose land use.

And then came the Great Places Initiative. This initiative has given us the stimulus to imagine how we can use planned and future Whiterock, Coon Rapids and State projects to realize the full potential of the Coon Rapids – Whiterock area.

Our Great Places team is very excited as we submit our offer to the Citizens Advisory Board for consideration as one of the state's three pilot Great Places! Our offer combines the foundational strengths of the Coon Rapids community with the natural beauty and diverse features of the Whiterock area resulting in an authentic and matchless destination for all Iowans. Our Great Place experiences run the gamut from bird-watching to dark skies gazing, artisans to campers, nature hikes to mountain bikes, shopping to canoeing, and naturalists to native prairie. Our Great Place offer draws on the unique features of our land, our water, and our skies in concert with the creativity, commitment, and talent of our residents.

As you will discover, Whiterock Conservancy is our gemstone and forms the core of our vision. Whiterock's central 4,300-acre expanse includes eight miles of the Middle Raccoon River, hilly pastures, riverside bluffs, timber, wetland, native prairie and rare oak savanna areas. So it is only natural that we want to extend our city's present 3.5 mile river trail into Whiterock and loop it back so it offers our residents an up close and personal experience with the outdoors and all that it offers. But this is only the beginning.

Given its proximity to three neighboring trail systems, Coon Rapids is a natural place to become *the* bike trail hub in western Iowa. As these trails are completed and connected



during the next decade, bikers from all directions can pedal into Coon Rapids - Whiterock to enjoy an experience unlike any other within the state of Iowa.

Our recreational opportunities are exceptional and improving all the time. We have some of the darkest skies in Iowa and have already hosted the 4<sup>th</sup> Iowa Star Party. We have horseback riding, canoeing, and bird watching. We have a fabulous Aquatic Center and half a dozen great public fishing ponds. And recently, a growing number of creative local entrepreneurs have been making fine wares from stained glass to pottery, and from custom blacksmith work to smoked chicken.

Our community is filled with social organizations and our town's young leadership has a proven track record of innovation and quality. Our residents and our institutions work hand in hand to weave a network of care and service for our young and to our old. This inclusive community is always ready to embrace the newcomer and the new idea.

Again we say wow!

We invite you to study our offer carefully and imagine with us.

Doug Carpenter, Potter  
Chair, CRDG Business Development Committee

Travis Castle  
Chair, Coon Rapids Development Group

Liz Garst, Banker  
Executive Director of Whiterock Conservancy and Manager of Garst Farm Resorts.

Rachel Garst  
Outreach Coordinator for Whiterock Conservancy.  
Chair, CRDG Human Relations/Diversity Committee

Keith Dorpinghaus  
Mayor, Coon Rapids

## WE HAVE ... WE IMAGINE

### **Whiterock Conservancy**

A new non-profit soon to open a 4,300-acre land gift for public recreation and environmental education.

### **Prairie Remnants**

Whiterock's diversity must be inventoried and its prairie remnants must be protected from further invasion and degradation.

### **Local Trails**

A beautiful paved 3.5 mile riverside walking trail, and the best trail riding in Western Iowa.

### **Creativity & Sense of Place**

Local artists, tradesmen and farmers seek innovative ways to celebrate and enjoy a rural lifestyle.

### **Natural Resources**

A beautiful river, four city parks, unusually dark skies, great hunting, great bird watching, and restored prairie and wetlands.

### **Destination Potential**

Whiterock gives new impetus to plans to make Coon Rapids a state bike trail hub.

### **A Unique History**

Coon Rapids has a rich and unique local history linked to corn production and agricultural innovation.

### **Award-winning Nursing Home**

Our numerous older residents are well served by Thomas Rest Haven, which won the 2005 Governors Award for Quality Care.

### **Excellent school, increasing diversity**

Our excellent school district is on the front lines of new opportunities and challenges.

### **Emergency Responders**

Excellent volunteer fire department and EMT crews, which have outgrown their current facilities.

### **Whiterock with Public Access**

New signage, parking and restroom facilities, and some urgent trail redesign allow Whiterock to open the land to a fivefold increase in visitors.

### **Restored Prairie**

Targeted restoration efforts within Whiterock's huge land area to successfully nurture native plant, animal and bird diversity.

### **Town Loop Trail**

A 4-mile paved loop connects Whiterock, the Garst Farm ponds and the Khrushchev house with the Coon Rapids walking trail and business district.

### **Rural Tourism**

Dozens of local entrepreneurs offer a variety of arts, crafts, local foods and nontraditional recreation to regional visitors seeking an authentic rural experience.

### **A Green Community**

CRDG, the city, Whiterock, and other regional organizations protect and enhance our green spaces, parks, watershed, and dark skies.

### **Coon Rapids is State Trail Hub**

Trail connections to the East, North and SW connect Coon Rapids and Whiterock with state and national bike trails.

### **Corn Museum**

A world-class corn museum connects us to our past, showcases two of our most high-tech businesses, and serves as a Main Street destination spot.

### **More Options for Elders**

Older residents have expanded options for aging in place, including independent and assisted living, respite care, dementia care & home care.

### **Bilingual School-Community Liaison**

A bilingual volunteer coordinator also doing Latino Outreach increases school-community connections.

### **New Emergency Facilities**

A modern fire & ambulance center supports larger trucks & equipment and assists out volunteers' response to increases in outdoor recreation accidents and other emergencies.



## II. OUR VISION

As we look to the future of our Great Place, we imagine a thrilling vision. Within five years Whiterock Conservancy, fabulous trail connections, and dozens of creative things to do have made diverse, accessible Coon Rapids the ecotourism hub of Western Iowa.

The number of visitors to our community will have increased five-fold, from about 4,000 to 20,000 by the end of the decade. Individuals and families are coming from all over Iowa and beyond to hike, fish, bird-watch, star-gaze, trail ride, bike ride, canoe, or drive a motorized cart on the extensive outdoor trail system. Many of these visitors will choose to stay the night in one of our many area RV parks, campgrounds, cabins, hotel rooms, and bed and breakfasts, contributing greatly towards the area economy.

The nonprofit Whiterock Conservancy will have come into its own as manager of a central 4,300-acre expanse of pasture, timber, prairie and wetlands that starts in the town of Coon Rapids and extends eight miles southeast along the Middle Raccoon River. Whiterock's professionally planned trail network has allowed most of the land to be opened to the public without causing undue environmental degradation nor interference with the Conservancy's ongoing sustainable agriculture and research activities.

Within five years the Conservancy will also have started several research programs and begun to develop a rich educational program. Outdoor displays on the history, geology, agriculture and ecology of the valley will be complemented with classes on nature-mapping and environmental restoration. Visitors can tour not just the restored Garst Farm house where Nikita Khrushchev visited Bob Garst in 1959, but can also watch a professionally produced video on the visit and its lessons. The Conservancy is directing scores of its guests to tour a variety of local farms and shops springing up in the area including a blacksmith shop, a commercial farm tour, quilt shops, raptor rehabilitation facility, and an orchard/apiary.

The growing number of visitors will make use of the rich recreational opportunities of the town of Coon Rapids, itself. User numbers are up at the golf course and the Aquatic Center, which now has a shelter house large enough to host large picnics. The farmers' market located at the town entrance is thriving, and a new motel is going up there as well.

In addition, the town is finally ready to open its long-planned Corn Museum, which both preserves and teaches the history of our community and attracts visitors to Main Street. The Museum tells the history of our community through the story of corn, from the time of the first settlers to the founding of the Garst and Thomas Hybrid Seed Corn Company to Tall Corn Ethanol today.

*Whiterock Conservancy, fabulous trail connections, and dozens of creative things to do have made diverse, accessible Coon Rapids the ecotourism hub of Western Iowa.*

Within a decade, in our vision, renewed state and federal funding for bike trails has allowed Coon Rapids to take its place as major hub in the Iowa Trail System. Cross-country bikers come through on the American Discovery Trail, from Omaha or beyond. Riders can also take advantage of the trail connections that join Coon Rapids to Whiterock Conservancy, the Sauk Rail Trail, and the Raccoon River Valley Trail to Des Moines. Restaurants, motels, and high-end craft and food sales can turn a trail ride from Des Moines into an engaging weekend experience.

Well-designed trail, parking, and concession facilities connect the town to the Conservancy allowing visitors to select the trail and tailor their visits to their specific interests and abilities. In 2008 a riverside “brown field” at the east end of Main Street was reclaimed, and is now a greenway bringing the trail rider right onto Main Street, from where the rider can follow a trail loop through town to the Garst Ponds, the Khrushchev-visit house, and three restored wetlands.

The greening of our Main Street and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue entrances have completed as a result of the hard work and vision of the CRDG Beautification Committee, which led the 2006-2008 Green Plan process. This process was an important tool for helping to ensure the long-term protection of our green spaces and natural resources.

Within five years the Green Planning Committee, together with Whiterock and the Astronomers Club, has helped foster awareness, and sales of sky friendly lighting inherent to the preservation of the unique darkness of our skies. We realize the pay-off for these efforts as our community receives the “dark skies designation” from the International Dark Skies Association, and more and more astronomers begin to regularly visit and even retire to the area.

The number of birders, well known as a group who will travel long distances if you have the bird they want to see, continues to increase. Even in 2005, Whiterock had an impressive initial bird list, and that list has only grown as the Conservancy has rapidly moved forward implementing sustainable land management methods and multipurpose grazing regimes. Bald Eagles soar overhead, and in our vision (cross your fingers!) Osprey nests have appeared alongside the Town Loop Trail.

In five years, Coon Rapids as a Great Place, will continue to be a safe, caring and inclusive community that recognizes its diverse population as an asset to economic growth and development. Our Latino population has increased to 5%, and our new residents are well integrated into the social, economic and religious life of our community. Coon Rapids and its resources are accessible to all people, regardless of race, culture, age or physical and/or mental capabilities.

### **Imagine the Future- An Engaging Experience**

***Whiterock Conservancy, with miles and miles of natural habitat, offers a plethora of opportunities for those seeking to commune with “Mother Nature” in an environment untouched by man-made tourist attractions. Whether saddling up a horse to explore***

*the vast natural prairies of Whiterock, or canoeing on the Middle Raccoon waters, you can almost envision what the experience must have been like for the land's native inhabitants or early settlers.*

*A grandchild is catching her first fish from one of the many Garst Ponds: what a great way to bond with grandpa and grandma while learning how to bait a hook!*

*Imagine the excitement of birders as they spy a species of bird seldom or never before seen in this part of Iowa or watch an eagle majestically soaring high overhead, peering down on those who are land bound.*

*Envision orange and red, leaves floating onto the trail of walkers and bicyclists enjoying an autumn day. Listen to leaves crunching underfoot as you breathe the pristine air surrounding the numerous trails leading in all directions from Coon Rapids.*

*Refreshment stands on Main Street tantalize trail users with a hearty taco, a cold ice cream cone, or a cool drink to sate their thirst.*

*Trail users are guided by multi-lingual signage directing them to points of interest, and services. .Parking lots accommodate all types of bicycles and motor vehicles.*

*With our agricultural heritage, it is fitting that education about sustainable land management and ecology are offered for conservation minded visitors. Classrooms for display, research and meetings support education and training for visitors from around the world.*

*Coon Rapids, designated as a Dark Sky Community enhances the experience of lying on your back at night and enjoying a shooting star as it zooms over the dark horizon, or standing in awe as the planet Jupiter is seen through the telescope of an amateur astronomer. People come from light-polluted cities to enjoy our dark skies and bright stars.*

*Volunteers of all ages are often seen maintaining our numerous city and parks and greenspaces, as well as working to restore native prairie at Whiterock. Our community members know that teaching children and youth to maintain and sustain the outdoor environment is a key to good conservation stewardship.*

*Visitors to our area will not find boxed retail stores in our towns. Local artisans have set up a centrally located site where they showcase their talents as well as offer their unique works for sale. Agricultural products, chemical free and organically grown, whether it's a tomato or a hog, are among the finest products that Iowa offers to consumers. Other retailers in our communities welcome visitors, offering an array of unique items and necessities.*

*Opening the doors to the world-class corn museum, one begins to understand the importance of agriculture in the nation. In glass cases there are pictures and documents that tell the story of how Roswell “Bob” Garst and Charlie Thomas, important contributors to the birth and growth of the hybrid corn industry, and explain the role agriculture has played in Iowa’s history. As visitors continue their tour through the museum, they come to better appreciate both the past and future of corn production, and they gain an understanding of how modern corn-based products, including ethanol and corn syrup, contribute to their daily lives.*

## **The Growth of Rural Tourism**

As we look to the future we see that rural tourism flourishes in our Great Place. Whiterock and our trail connections have opened new prospects for economic development for Coon Rapids. As our community has worked to free itself from the dependency and uncertainty of being a company town, the focus for local leaders has been on industrial and commercial development to diversify the economy and create jobs. Now Whiterock has added the prospect of ecotourism-driven expansion of our retail business base.

In five years, entrepreneurial endeavors that in 2006 were just starting, are now thriving. These include Hidden Acres Ranch’s stained glass studio, Earl Lee Phelps blacksmith shop and farm tour, Pam Esheid’s Quilt shop; Charles Carpenter’s and David Toussain’s Orchard and Apiary, Nancy Thompson’s landscape painting, Gloria Brouse’s Windy Ridge Flowers and Vineyard, Kay Neumann’s raptor education programs, and Doug Carpenter’s Mapleshade Pottery. The sale of local food products has also increased. Products include Steve and Susie Siedel’s non-antibiotic meat and smoked chicken, and Bill Jahn’s organic vegetables and fruit.

***Cherish your visions, cherish your ideals, cherish the music that stirs in your heart, the beauty that forms in your mind, the loveliness that drapes your pure thoughts, for out of them will grow delightful conditions, all heavenly environments; of these you but remain true to them; your world will at least be built.***

Quote from New Zealander  
Statesman Minister of Defense James Allen (1912-20) 1855-

Additional private businesses were created when Garst Farm Resorts was donated to the Whiterock in 2006 and the nonprofit Conservancy decided to outsource services previously handled by the Resort. New local enterprises were created offering horse-back riding lessons, guided trail rides, canoe rental and shuttle service, event and wedding planning, and catering. The Conservancy has continued to generate income for support of restoration and public use by renting its facilities for corporate retreats, weddings, etc, and opening a portion of the land for paid hunting.

Meanwhile, local residents continue businesses expansion of our recreational opportunities. From Motocross racing to archery, from Paint Ball courts to rock climbing (Annex 4), there is always something new and different to do in Coon Rapids, Iowa.

### **WHAT IS RURAL TOURISM?**

*Ecotourism, in an agricultural area might also be called “rural tourism,” “agrotourism,” or even “agro ecotourism,” depending on its central focus. However, regardless of what it is called it has a very simple central premise: the notion that conservation and sustainable local development are linked.*

*If local people are enriched and empowered by attracting visitors to see natural resources, then they will work to ensure the protection and enrichment of those natural resources.*

*Generally, eco-tourism is thought of as an "everyman's" source of income and empowerment; .it does not mean Cancun Hilton Hotels. In some cases it can involve a full-scale business, in others, a little extra income for a high-school student, farm-owner or retiree. If local people can no longer make a living just farming, perhaps they can preserve their beloved farm lifestyle by selling farm produced goods and services.*

*Eco-tourism is not a common concept in the U.S., but is very prevalent in most of the rest of the world, especially in nature-oriented tourist destinations such as Kenya, Costa Rica, and Thailand. In these places, a broad swath of citizens derive significant income from nature tourists, by feeding, sheltering, transporting, and guiding them, as well as by selling them local crafts, etc. A double benefit is that these same local citizens are motivated to protect the resource that attracts the tourists.*

The successful marketing of our community by CRDG and Whiterock has been key to our success. Located midway between Des Moines and Omaha, our town has over 1.5 million people within a 2 hour drive. Starting with the work that the consulting firm REL did with CRDG in 2005, carefully targeted marketing campaigns have enabled us to attract specific user groups: urban visitors longing for an authentic Iowan rural experience, astronomers, bird-watchers, parents who wish to take their children fishing, horse-owners who need a place to ride, history buffs, and environmental researchers. .

### **Imagine the Future – A Rich Social Fabric**

*How important is it to a community to have an inclusive and caring environment? Obviously, it's very important. Our community values its multi-aged population, from its senior citizens to infants. Thomas Rest Haven the local nursing home was the recipient of the 2005 Governor's Award for Quality Care. In our great place vision it now also offers, assisted living and respite care as well as dementia and home care.*

*Youth take an active role as volunteers at the care facilities. Whether reading, playing board and card games, or just listening to tales of yesteryear the interaction between the generations conveys the importance of our history and our sense of place.*

*“Hola, Como esta?” “Fine, thank you.” This a conversation taking place on a daily basis between a student and long-time local resident. Both have come to realize the importance of getting to know another language and culture. A bilingual school-community liaison focus on Latino outreach. She works with our school, and various*



*civic and religious organizations to help our citizens understand the value of diversity in an ever changing, progressive community.*

### **Growing a Diverse and Inclusive Community**

By the end of the decade Coon Rapids has continued as a vibrant community in large part due to its very dynamic leadership. Our city and private institutions have continued to attract and retain professional directors and managers who focus on quality and innovation, as well as deep commitment to this particular place. Indeed, in large part it is our Great Place qualities which help to keep them here.

Our quick development as one of Western Iowa's Great Places has been a busy and stressful period, but our structures and organizations have evolved to meet the resulting financial and human challenges. Indeed, the many environmental, planning, marketing, business development, and fundraising activities occurring as part of the Great Places Initiative have allowed our current leaders to hone their leadership skills. In addition these experiences have helped to pull our community together around a common vision.

Coon Rapids is an inclusive community, and the process of becoming a Great Place will make it even more so. By the end of the decade we envision that our community has been enriched by two astronomers in addition to our first astronomer, retiree Charles Fletcher. At least five more minority families, several environmental professionals, and several retirees have chosen to live here. New talent including professional and artistic men and women will be attracted to the area by work and business prospects. Our community-wide fiber optic network and advances in information technology allow telecommuters to live and work in Coon Rapids. This will encourage many families to move to Coon Rapids to take advantage of our outstanding quality of life.

In the coming years as our city grows and visitor numbers increase, our new fire and ambulance facility supports our crews in meeting the challenges from the increased number of homes and businesses.

Our older residents continue to be the heart of our community. They grew up on the land and have profound truths to share. Seniors form the core of our vast network of social and volunteer organizations and are valued, respected and involved. By 2010, besides having ready access to the best nursing home in the state of Iowa, our seniors will have many more options for aging in place, including independent and assisted living, respite care, dementia care and home care opportunities.

By 2010 we envision our community as having over a dozen minority families, well-accepted and well-integrated into our economic, social, political and religious life.

CRDG's Diversity Committee continues to work to foster acceptance and tolerance among all elements of our population. Language has been used as a strategic tool to bring people together. A dozen adult residents of Coon Rapids have taken it upon themselves

to learn basic Spanish, while a volunteer Latino/white committee gives every primary school child in Coon Rapids at least 15 minutes of Spanish education each week.

A bilingual school-community liaison was employed from 2006-2008. Great strides were made in integrating Latino families into the school and workforce. Many school administrators and personnel have participated in multi-cultural training, and at least basic Spanish words and cultural practices are integrated into the curriculum where ever possible.

The liaison also organized numerous adults and businesses volunteers in the school, and organized student volunteer placements and internships at businesses throughout the community. Several agreements, including with Whiterock Conservancy, appear likely to continue into the future.

***Our Vision? We see the Coon Rapids –Whiterock, the town of Coon Rapids, our local farmers and entrepreneurs, and our diverse cultural groups working in partnership to create a Great Place richer than any one group alone could achieve. Whiterock Conservancy is a huge, gorgeous, environmentally diverse center for research, education, and authentic, experiences. Local leaders, quick to see the economic development potential of our vision, have stepped forward to protect our common natural resources, to develop and promote rural tourism, and to connect our trails to State-wide bike trails. Local people will benefit from new creative outlets and retail opportunities. And the state of Iowa adds a new Great Place to its list of attractions.***



## Our Profile

### In a Nutshell

A Unique Sense of Place	<i>Coon Rapids, while valuing its history as a river town, railroad town and the historic home of the Garst &amp; Thomas Seed Corn Company, also embraces a vision of the future as an important environmental research and destination area.</i>
Engaging Experiences	<i>The vast new Whiterock Conservancy nature preserve, in concert with our existing outdoor recreation and ecotourism attractions, make Coon Rapids a prime destination for all who seek an engaging and authentic rural experience.</i>
A Rich Social Fabric	<i>Coon Rapids is a caring community that cares for both its youth and elderly via a variety of social and service initiatives. Our newest Latino residents are attracted by the town's safety, good schools and welcoming attitudes.</i>
A Vital Economy	<i>Coon Rapids continues the transition from a farming town once dominated by hybrid seed corn processing to a more diversified economy with a strong eco-tourism component.</i>
Pleasing Environment	<i>In a state dominated by row-crops, Coon Rapids and Whiterock Conservancy are an oasis of environmental diversity, fabulous outdoor recreation, great natural beauty, a unique geologic history, and the darkest skies (hence brightest stars) in Iowa.</i>
A Strong Foundation	<i>Coon Rapids is well-served and well-positioned by the synergy of our state-of-the-art municipal utilities, an active community development group, good city governance, an outstanding school system, a well-maintained housing base, excellent road and rail access and strategic sites for business and residential development.</i>
A Creative Culture	<i>Coon Rapids is a progressive and innovative community with a long history of embracing new ideas, new residents and visitors, the most famous being Nikita Khrushchev in 1959. Retiring alumni are returning home, getting involved, and introducing new vigor, especially in the arts.</i>

## **A Unique Sense of Place.**

*Coon Rapids values its history as a river town, a railroad town, and the home of the Garst & Thomas Seed Corn Company, while embracing a vision of the future as an important environmental research and destination area.*

### **After the Age of Glaciers – a River Town is Born**

Our sense of place is closely intertwined with our lands and our river. Coon Rapids and Whiterock have a unique geological history. The unusual cretaceous sandstone rock formations along our river are being studied by the US Geological Survey. The bluffs continue to provide clues to what our area was like 100 million years ago, offer the hope of finding dinosaur bones and other significant fossils, and provide some of the most scenic river stretches in Iowa. Eons later, the last glacier, the Wisconsin drift, stopped right at Coon Rapids, bisecting the area's topography and revealing the cretaceous formation. Northward lies the prairie pothole region, dotted with artesian wells and deep, rich black cropland. To the south are older soils and rolling hills which are better suited for cattle grazing than row-cropping. The Middle Raccoon River rolls right between them as it heads down to join the Des Moines River and eventually the Mississippi. The terminal moraine glacial formations and the nearby Mississippi-Missouri Divide add additional zest to our rich geology.

The earliest record of settlement is in 1854. Around this time a post office was built, and the town was named Coon Rapids after the nearby rapids on the Middle Raccoon River. The original town was laid out along the river which was dammed to support a grist mill and later a flour and saw mill. The town really began to prosper after the railroad arrived in 1881. The railroad company sold land along its route and homesteaders spread across the area, draining and farming the land. Coon Rapids was incorporated in 1884. Since 1881, its history has been reported every week by the Coon Rapids Enterprise. This history is proudly taught to every 5<sup>th</sup> grade class. We continue our traditions through the annual County Fair. The [www.coonrapidsiowa.info](http://www.coonrapidsiowa.info) website is our current and most extensive chronicle of our history.

### **From Seed Corn to Ecotourism**

The historic Garst & Thomas Hybrid Seed Corn Company was founded in 1930. The colorful Roswell "Bob" Garst made front page history in 1959 when he was visited at his farm by Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. Roswell's innovations in hybrid seed, fertilizer and the cattle industry parallel the explosion of agricultural productivity in the Midwest over the past six decades. Harold Lee's book, Roswell Garst: A Biography, ISU Press, chronicles his life and times.

Roswell's son, the late Steve Garst, was a local farmer and cattle breeder who promoted no-till planting, waterways, terraces, and other soil conservation measures, in addition to being an innovator in cattle genetics. He was an avid hunter and fisherman who became an ardent bike trail advocate. Steve's wife and five daughters joined together in 2004 to further advance biodiversity and ecotourism with their first land donation of what will

ultimately become a 5,000 acre gift to the nonprofit Whiterock Conservancy. Included in that gift is the farmstead visited by Mr. Khrushchev and the family's current ecotourism business, Garst Farm Resorts.

### **Our New and Evolving Sense of Place**

The new Whiterock Board is directed and controlled by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. A central focus of Whiterock will be to chronicle and document the changing land uses of the Middle Raccoon River Valley, from the time of Native American buffalo hunts through early pioneer days, drainage of the areas vast sloughs, the depression homesteaders, the introduction of hybrid corn and mechanized agriculture, soil conservation efforts, the farm crisis of the 1980s, extending into the modern age of biotechnology, ethanol production, prairie and wetland restoration, and ecotourism.

The town of Coon Rapids, long characterized by its revolving corncob sign, summer detassling crews, giant corn processing plant and world's largest corncob pile, is now also home to the state of the art Tall Corn Ethanol plant. There is strong interest within the community in preserving our past, current and future involvement with corn via a Corn Museum.

## **2. Engaging Experiences**

*Whiterock Conservancy and other outdoor recreation and ecotourism attractions make Coon Rapids a prime destination for all those who want an engaging and authentic rural experience.*

### **The Whiterock Experience**

An oasis of environmental diversity in an agricultural state, Whiterock Conservancy offers thousands of acres of timber, wetlands, prairie and pasture for low-impact, free or low-cost outdoor recreation, including hiking, trail-riding, mountain-biking, bird-watching, mushroom hunting, canoeing, fishing, and stargazing.

Whiterock Conservancy will contribute to the future of Iowa's land use practices as a center for applied research and education. It will focus on prairie and wetland restoration and sustainable agricultural practices, including multipurpose grazing where diversified pastures support both cattle and wildlife. Classroom instruction, internships, volunteer opportunities, and both indoor and outdoor demonstration areas, developed in close coordination with Iowa's universities, will serve both casual and serious students of the land.

Whiterock is also committed to showcasing the unique aspects of rural Iowa life through tours and presentations given by local residents on subjects such as astronomy, non-traditional farming, wildlife viewing, commercial agriculture, ethanol and bio-diesel production, raptor rehabilitation, prairie botany, gardening, blacksmithing, and other trades and specialties. Finally, Whiterock is planning to create self-guided driving tours

showcasing the interesting places to be found as one drives to our community from nearby tourist attractions, Omaha and Des Moines.

### **The Coon Rapids Experience**

The City of Coon Rapids also offers considerable recreational opportunities, including a modern aquatic center, 9-hole golf course, tennis courts, bowling alley, pool hall (with a snooker table!), a 3.5 mile paved walking trail along the river, and four parks. The most recent enhancement was construction of a disk golf course. The Coon Rapids Recreation Center, a former high school gym, will need attention in coming years. Ongoing community events, attended by residents and open to visitors, include weekly bingo nights, Astronomy Club, adult Spanish classes, the 4<sup>th</sup> of July Fireworks Show, the Carroll County Fair, numerous church suppers and fundraisers and the Highway 141 Garage Sale.

Local shopping opportunities include Frohlich's Grocery Store ( a 4<sup>th</sup> generation family-run business), Country Store & Liquor Shop, New Hope Village Bargain Shoppe, Gary's Antiques, True Value Hardware, Coon Rapids Farm & Lumber, Coon Rapids Pharmacy, a new Ford dealership, Carter's stained glass, weekly summer Farmers Market, and in nearby Bayard, a new quilting store. Other local artisans (including a basket maker, potter, landscape painter, blacksmith, and bench maker) are also seeking to develop a central retail outlet for their wares.

### **3. A Rich Social Fabric**

*Coon Rapids is a true community that organizes to care for both its youth and elderly, and involves most of the town in a variety of social and service efforts. Our newest Latino residents are attracted by the town's safety, good schools, and welcoming attitudes.*

### **Our Diverse Population**

Coon Rapids' 1305 residents are the town's greatest asset. The sense of mutual trust and safety is so strong that few bother to lock their homes or cars, and people of all ages look out for each other in ways both big and small.

Children are a major focus of our town's life. The towns of Coon Rapids and Bayard share a modern elementary and secondary public school, small enough that every child gets individual academic attention and every child who wishes can go out for band or play on a sports team. Excellent youth sports' programs flourish with extensive volunteer support. However, more and better quality day-care is needed by the town's two-career families and single parents.

The 2000 census also counted 267 Coon Rapids residents aged 70 or more. The advanced age of the population accounts for the large number of 1 or 2 person households (177 and 186, respectively). Many of our older residents' special needs are met with Congregate Meals, home care services, the Western Iowa Transport van and through our excellent Thomas Rest Haven, which received the 2005 Governor's Award for Quality Care in Health Care Facilities.

While hard work, toughness and ingenuity were valued over advanced formal education by many of our oldest residents, our recent high school graduates are choosing post-secondary educational opportunities in ever-increasing numbers. Many of these graduates have expressed a strong desire to return to Coon Rapids after completing their studies and become entrepreneurs and business owners as they raise families, provide leadership and make meaningful contributions to future generations.

### **Opportunities to Socialize, Learn and Make a Difference**

The town's ongoing sense of values and community is expressed through its myriad religious, service, social and sports organizations (see attached list). The Methodists, Catholics, Christians and Lutherans all have strong congregations. Together they organize the food pantry and a summer ecumenical church program. We have a strong volunteer fire and ambulance program. The town also has over 30 social and service clubs, including Rotary, Masons, Lions Club, PEO, TTT, Red Hat Club, Astronomy Club, Book Club, the Golf Association, bowling leagues, and numerous groups who organize youth sports and volunteer to run them.

Coon Rapids has gathering places for weddings, social events, and meetings, including our church halls, the Municipal Building, and Legion Hall-Community Center, as well as four town parks and the fairgrounds. The River House and its historic Dance Barn, in the center of the Whiterock Valley, have long served as a gathering place in the community, and is frequently used for weddings, graduations, anniversaries, company parties and fundraisers.

### **New Iowans**

About a dozen years ago a large number of migrant Latino families began to arrive in Coon Rapids each fall to work the sorting line at the Garst Seed plants. For 7 weeks a year these 120 workers and their children boosted the town's Hispanic population to 13%, and the migrant children, many of whom return year after year, became an important component of CR-B school enrollment.

In recent years the school and the community have sought to better know and serve these temporary residents. The school began an ESL program followed in 2003 with an in-depth study of migrant student needs. In 2004 an extensive migrant assistance program included an orientation sheet, welcome picnic, vegetable delivery, odd-jobs clearinghouse, and "rent-to-migrant" housing campaign. Iowa Savings Bank and many other local businesses supported this creative effort.

At first only one but now five Latino families have chosen to settle year-round in Coon Rapids and they and their children have become an important asset for cultural diversity. Currently our population is 97.5% white, 1.6% Latino and 0.8% other races, but it is hoped and expected that diversity will continue to increase as new jobs are created in Coon Rapids and the surrounding area.



In 2004 the Coon Rapids Development Group recruited its first resident Latino members and established a Diversity Committee which organizes ongoing Spanish language instruction for adults and children and other opportunities for positive Latino-local resident interactions. Businesses contributing to community diversity include Garst Seed, Precision of Iowa (which is attempting to recruit bilingual telemarketers), the Country Store, and the new Hobby Farms squirrel corn-bagging business.

#### **4. A Vital Economy.**

*Coon Rapids continues its transition from a farming town dominated by the hybrid seed corn processing plant to a more diversified economy with a strong ecotourism component.*

##### **An Ever-Evolving Economy**

Coon Rapids' economy historically has had and will continue to have a strong agricultural component. However, like many other farming communities it was hit hard by the shift of retail to regional centers and the farm crisis of the 1980s. More insecurity was created in 1986 when the locally-owned Garst Seed Company passed into multinational hands. The most recent buyer, Syngenta, laid off 30-40 people in 2004-5, and its plans for the Coon Rapids facility are not known at this time.

These changes have significantly impacted family and community economics. Retail sales remain depressed. In 2000, the community's 55 retail businesses averaged sales of just \$5,137 per capita of population. In addition, much of the local work was low-wage, and 26% of the town's workforce commuted 25 minutes or more to work. Nearly all farm families have been forced to seek additional off-farm employment; and women have entered the workforce in great numbers. In 2000, of 556 total employed, 288 were male and 268 female.

##### **Business Growth and Expansion**

On a brighter note, core retail businesses, most especially the grocery store and hardware store, have remained despite the retirement of their original owners. Our 25 mile distance from the four surrounding county-seat towns has provided some protection for our retail business. Our community has attracted a new Ford dealership, a telemarketing firm, several smaller telecommunications and internet-based firms, a "squirrel corn business", and Tall Corn Ethanol, a state-of-the-art ethanol plant. ET Video, begun on a shoestring by a local resident in 1985, has expanded into one of the county's leading distributors of video tapes and DVDs. The company recently built a new corporate headquarters with assistance from the city and the CRDG. Other small businesses, including a medical center, computer printer business, a chiropractor, and two natural resource consulting companies, are also based in the Coon Rapids area. As a result, employment has expanded in recent years, more than offsetting the cut-backs at the seed company. The CR-B school system and Thomas Rest Haven are two strong ongoing sources of employment. The Carroll County Savings Bank will soon be opening a new branch facility in a recently restored bank building. Several other buildings on Main Street have also been upgraded, although more Main Street building restoration work is needed.

## **5. Pleasing Environment**

*In a state dominated by row-crops, Coon Rapids and Whiterock Conservancy offer a large oasis of environmental diversity, fabulous outdoor recreation, great natural beauty, unique geologic history, and the darkest skies (hence brightest stars) in Iowa.*

### **Our City**

Coon Rapids is a lovely Midwestern community with family homes surrounded by lush yards, a rustic Main Street, a nine-hole golf course, an 8-acre Riverside Park and walking trail, a large city park, a road side park, and three smaller children's playgrounds. The City of Coon Rapids does a commendable job maintaining the community's streets and sidewalks, keeping the city clean, and managing waste disposal.

The dynamic Coon Rapids Development Group and many other volunteer organizations assist in town beautification efforts. Recent fund raising efforts have provided for the purchase of new Christmas street decorations, improvement of entrance signs, and initiation of a Living Roadway Trust project at the east entrance to Coon Rapids. The Community has recently been awarded a second Living Roadway Trust grant for beautification of the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue entrance.

The City of Coon Rapids, with new prospects of becoming a major Iowa and regional destination area, will benefit from careful review of its zoning plans and environmental policies as well as the adoption of central streetscape and landscape designs for major streets. This review process will support the evolution of Coon Rapids into a truly "Green City".

### **Whiterock Area**

Starting at the edge of town and extending eight miles southeast along both shores of the Middle Raccoon River is Whiterock preserve: a diverse 4,300-acre tract of rolling pastures containing prairie remnants, reconstructed prairies and wetlands, rare side-hill seeps, and oak and hickory forests. Thanks to a recent botanical survey, we know that the area contains 302 distinct plant communities, well more than 400 plant species and numerous rare and endangered plants. Whiterock, along with two nearby state-owned wetlands (Dunbar Slough and McCords Pond) is also home to numerous wild bird species. Whiterock is already being nominated as an Audubon Society "Important Bird Area" and is also being considered as a state-designated Bird Conservation Area. As habitat restoration advances, the importance of Whiterock as a bird-watching destination will only increase. There are several high-quality park and recreation areas in the surrounding counties, which could some day provide regional "watchable wildlife" destinations. The area also provides prime hunting habitat for deer, turkey, pheasant and ducks.

### **Our River**

The Middle Raccoon River runs along the north and east sides of town and its timbered banks still hold remains of the past ranging from Native American artifacts, to old house

foundations to slag piles left by depression era coal-mines. It is one of the longest undammed stretches of river in Iowa, and the segment south of town is one of the most scenic in Iowa. The Coon Rapids sewage facility drains into a reconstructed wetland, before entering the river. The river itself, however, has been heavily affected by intensive row-cropping and animal confinements north of town. It is currently overloaded with nitrates, sediment, and bacteria. The Middle Raccoon River Regional Watershed Foundation led by Jon Judson of Diversity Farms, works with private landowners within the watershed to help promote practices that protect water quality. Whiterock Conservancy has recently recruited Iowa Water Volunteers to assist with water quality measurement. However, more watershed improvement work is needed.

## **Our Skies**

Coon Rapids has the darkest skies in Iowa, due to both its distance from major population centers and the use of sky-friendly lighting by CRMU. Whiterock and the local Astronomy Club are encouraging the city to pass local lighting ordinances to protect the area's uniquely dark night skies, thus increasing our attraction to astronomers and others who simply like to enjoy the beauty of a night sky full of stars.

## **Progress Toward Accessibility**

Coon Rapids's natural and built environments are highly accessible. Conservancy hiking trails and stocked fishing ponds are free. The Latino population, in particular, enjoys the fishing. Motorized rental carts facilitate access to the preserve for the elderly and handicapped. The Coon Rapids Aquatic Center provides summer swimming pool passes for \$5 to any family qualifying for the school lunch program. The swimming pool park, the library and the Municipal Building are all handicapped accessible.

## **6. A Strong Foundation.**

*Coon Rapids has state-of-the-art municipal utilities, an active community development group, good city governance, an outstanding school system, a well-maintained housing base, high-speed internet service, excellent road and rail access, and numerous sites available for business and residential development.*

## **State-of-the-Art Municipal Utilities**

Since its inception in 1937, the Coon Rapids Municipal Utilities (CRMU) has pioneered the application of modern technology to support its customer base. Today in addition to gas, power, and waste water treatment, CRMU provides a variety of telecommunications services including local and long distance phone service, dial-up internet and cable television including high-definition programming and cable modems. For years, because of its wise investments in power generation facilities, CRMU has provided electrical power at one of lowest rates in the state.

## **Coon Rapids Development Group**

In 1999 the Coon Rapids Development Group (CRDG) was formed to provide central direction to town development efforts, bringing together previously un-coordinated organizations, including the Chamber of Commerce, the housing group and the economic

development group. CRDG raises over \$30,000 per year from 110 local investors and has volunteer committees working on housing, beautification, community enhancement, business development and diversity.

The CRDG spearheaded the construction of two new residential sub-divisions to provide badly needed moderate and high-income housing lots. It has been instrumental in attracting some of the new business mentioned above and has also overseen several initiatives including the Farmers Market, the Christmas Lights project, and several other seasonal events. The “to-do” list for CRDG includes preparation of new business development materials, as well as better visitor and new resident orientation materials. To that end, the group is currently working with a consultant to better define a “brand” and key messages. Another project, the establishment of a Coon Rapids Foundation by the end of 2005, will significantly increase our potential for local investment.

### **Our City Council**

The City Council and Mayor are doing a great job maintaining city infrastructure, investing in community recreational facilities and supporting economic development initiatives. A major bridge replacement on the northeast corner of town was recently completed, and another bridge replacement on the south side of town is currently in process. Consensus is growing that the City needs a new fire station and ambulance office. Current facilities, using a building erected in 1911, are inadequate.

The City has employed TIF to support several projects. A TIF District was established in the early 1990s and proceeds were first used to establish new apartment buildings and related infrastructure on the west side of town. TIF funds were also used to provide incentives to a local business, ET Video, for major expansion in Coon Rapids. CRDG-supplied and TIF funds have also been invested in two new residential lot developments. The City is currently using TIF money to assist low-income owners in home repair and restoration.

### **Housing**

Although the city’s homes are aging (48% were constructed before 1939, and the median value is \$59,800), our housing is in generally good repair. This is, in large part, because the city sponsored a \$400,000 Housing Rehabilitation Program implemented with the assistance of the Region 12 Council of Governments. Also though Region 12, using TIF funds, the city is currently providing \$1000 grants for housing rehabilitation to 24 low income home owners, and using another region 12 program to provide up to \$1600 down payment assistance for new homeowners.

Recently several spectacular homes making maximum use of the area’s great natural beauty have been constructed as well as new condo and apartment units and several moderate-income homes. Four senior-living apartment complexes and the Thomas Rest Haven, our award-winning nursing home, provide housing for senior citizens. Still needed are a motel, respite-living facilities, and expanded low-income rental options.

### **Available Commercial and Industrial Facilities**

The town has an inventory of two vacant 10,000 square foot buildings, and several commercial acreages along Highway 141. Development of a commercial-industrial park on these acreages is being planned by CRDG. A few buildings on Main Street are also for sale. More buildings may be available in the future depending on Syngenta decisions.

### **Our School System**

In order to become more efficient, in 2004 the Coon Rapids-Bayard School Board closed the intermediate school building in Bayard and the Coon Rapids-Bayard High School was expanded to include grades 6 and 7. Declining enrollment has put some stress on district finances, but the school continues to provide an outstanding academic and extracurricular programs. Carroll County's recent approval the SILO tax will provide funds for the school to tackle additional infrastructure needs, notably demolition of the abandoned Bayard school building.

### **Transportation**

Coon Rapids is well connected via rail and road. Corn is shipped out and fertilizer shipped in on the Burlington Northern railroad. Paved highways lead east to Perry, north to Carroll, SW to Audubon, SE to Guthrie Center and west to Manning. These neighboring communities, with complementary tourism facilities such as the Manning Haus Barn, the Perry Hotel Pattee, or the Carroll Swan Lake Nature Education Center are an approximately 30-minute drive from Coon Rapids.

The closest small airports are in the surrounding towns of Carroll, Guthrie Center, Audubon and Jefferson, with international airports in Des Moines and Omaha. Driving times to major metropolitan area are 7 hours to Chicago, 11 to Denver, 5.5 to Minneapolis and 9 to Saint Louis. Coon Rapids is 40 miles north of Interstate 80.

### **Public Spaces**

Our public spaces and buildings are used year-round. The Municipal Building houses the city clerk, CRMU, the Coon Rapids Library, and police. It is also used for local club meetings, for dance lessons and exercise classes, and Congregate Meals. The newer facilities in town, including all City facilities, are ADA compliant, and many of our curbs have been modified to provide wheel chair access. In addition to hosting the annual fair, the Carroll County Fair Grounds are also used for wildly popular Figure 8 car races. Five races are held each summer attracting over 2000 attendees to each race. Public support for the Carroll County Fair plus increased revenue from the races has allowed considerable upgrading of fair facilities. The River House Dance Barn, located in the center of Whiterock Conservancy, has also been used for more than 80 years by the community for graduations, anniversaries, fund-raisers, company gatherings and more. Whiterock Conservancy will need its current facilities for meetings and seminars improved. It will also need additional space for environmental education. In addition to supporting the Conservancy's needs, these facilities will be made available for community use.

### **Public Support**

Public support for infrastructure improvements is very high. In 1995-1996 the town successfully raised \$1.3 million for the construction of a new Aquatic Center. The \$900,000 bond issue was approved by more than 85% of the citizens. In 2003 a new medical and rehabilitation clinic was built adjacent to the Thomas Rest Haven, funded substantially through the donations of a local family and the Iowa Savings Bank. Over the last decade the community has also made significant investments in trails, a boat ramp, park enhancements, street and bridge upgrades, playground equipment, and fair building replacement.

Volunteer groups maintain plantings on Main Street and around the town entry signs. CRDG, the Carroll County Conservation Board and local volunteers are working on improving Riverside Park

## **7. A Creative Culture.**

*Coon Rapids is a progressive and innovative community with a long history of embracing new ideas, new residents and visitors, the most famous being Nikita Khrushchev in 1959. Retiring alumni are returning home, getting involved, and introducing new vigor, especially in the arts.*

### **Our Creative Tradition**

Coon Rapids has long been known as a progressive and, in some senses quirky community, home to free thinkers and innovators. This trend started with founding father Crockett Ribble who rejected the name “Fairview Acres” in favor of the much more colorful Coon Rapids. It continued in the depression era with the Heater Dance Barn and several people who came by rail from Chicago to buy suitcases full of bootleg Templeton Rye, and never left.

The Seed Company provided a steady stream of “newcomers” who helped the town learn to embrace new people and new ideas. Strangers were quickly brought into the fold; and guests made to feel welcome. Our most famous guest, Khrushchev, truly received a warm welcome here!

### **Creativity Since 1891**

Our town newspaper, the Coon Rapids Enterprise, published weekly since 1891, is excellent and always highly informative on both the history and unique attributes of our town and area. It has contributed to the town culture which appreciates quirkiness. Newspaper articles have profiled our best pool players and our unique snooker table, followed the life of imaginary Nemo the clown fish in our municipal sewer system, and illustrated the size of a locally-spotted mountain lion by posing Wilts Cretsinger's equally sized dog next to a variety of people and objects around town. From in-depth reports on our famous church bakers, “The Apple Dumpling Gang” to serious commentary about back-biting in the apple pie contest at the fair, the newspaper keeps our community entertained, informed.

### **Creative People**

Creative people are appreciated in Coon Rapids. For example, Harris Hess has contributed his eye for good architecture and classic style with his Main Street renovations. The Production Offices of Garst Seed and the Iowa Savings Bank building were also built with architectural flair. Dr John Clayburg runs his cutting-edge stock market trading program from his farm. Charles Carpenter and David Toussain have an innovative bee and orchard operation, deeply imbued with philosophical purpose, and Charles' sister Susan Carpenter lives on a boat in the middle of a field. Two different, but collaborative private natural resource contractors, Jon Judson and Dan Brouse, have developed good markets in a field normally dominated by the government employees. A local city councilman is introducing organic produce, with significant sales in Des Moines. The badge of a local Rotary Member lists her profession as "activist". She recently led a successful effort to stop the introduction of "midget wrestling" at the fair. Two local farm boys are trying to develop a business in worm castings; another has developed a market for "squirrel corn". Our recently retired garbage man invented his own truck design to handle new recycling needs. Garst Farm Resorts was built on the novel idea that "eco-tourism" could work in Iowa. The Seed Company, Tall Corn Ethanol and area farmers have proven histories as innovators. We are proud of our history of agricultural innovation. We will build on it to foster future growth of technology which is critical to our area's and Iowa's future.

### **A Creative Future**

Coon Rapids also has an incipient art movement, demonstrated by the rising placement of public art: the avant-garde Fluxus Indian Museum, corn planter sculptures, and the sculptures in front of the Thomas Rest Haven and the Iowa Savings Bank. New resident Doug Carpenter, who has opened a pottery studio, is currently promoting a public art exhibition. Our high school students are deeply involved in drama, music and art. In addition, local residents are training to work as commercial photographers.

A big boost to the town's creative culture is being provided by numerous former residents. Attracted by our great quality of life, natural beauty, and strong sense of community, they are returning to Coon Rapids. In some cases they are starting their second career based on their true passions. An initiative to convince recent college graduates and retirees to return has started. Now we need to provide more economic and artistic opportunities to keep our young people in Coon Rapids. We are an aging community; we need more opportunities to attract and retain young adults who can provide creative ideas, vigor, and kids for our school system.

### **A Final Word**

Coon Rapids has retained the heart and soul of a progressive community, through good times and bad, through controversy and smooth-sailing. For more than 130 years, we have dreamed of a better future and worked to achieve it. Today, by many measures we are a great place but we will not be satisfied until we achieve our full potential as one of Iowa's truly great places.





## **Coon Rapids-Whiterock Image Gallery**

The following pages present our profile as images from the multiple dimensions of a great place.

## Our Sense of Place

We began as a river town.



We became a farming town and a seed corn town. Travelers along Highway 141 still locate us by watching for the welcome sign with the rotating ear of corn.



Khrushchev's visit in 1959 helped put Coon Rapids on the map.



Today our sense of place is expanding as it embraces the preservation and enjoyment of our land and our river.



Our parks, our fair, our dance barn and other facilities provide opportunities for fun for residents and visitors.





## A Rich Social Fabric

Over 30 community organizations provide active social and support networks.



Our migrant worker welcome picnic was a treat for kids and adults.



Thomas Rest Haven provides a rich social life for its residents.



Civic, religious, and volunteer groups are the heart of our social fabric.



Inside, or outside, for fun or for a cause, there is often a barbeque, fish fry or chicken dinner to attend.





# A Vital Economy

Our economic engine is driven by a mix of large and small businesses.



Tall Corn Ethanol runs a state-of-the-art plant.

ET Video recently constructed a new corporate headquarters and distribution facility.



Sygenta's seed processing plant has an uncertain future.

Thomas Rest Haven is the recent winner of the Governor's award for quality care



Main Street serves as a retail hub for the surrounding area. The restored bank is the new home of a branch of the Carroll County Savings Bank.

## Our Evolving Economy



Precision of Iowa, a telemarketing company, and Advanced Laser Technologies, a supplier of printers and computers are two growing businesses that use rehabilitated buildings on Main Street. Precision is a minority-owned small business; ALT is owned by one of our forward thinking business leaders.

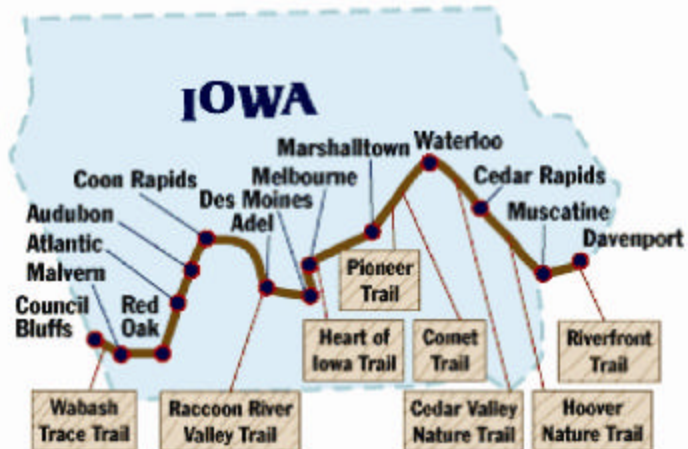


The entrance to Coon Rapids at the intersection of 5th Ave and HWY 141 is a prime location for ecotourism-related businesses. A beautification grant for this area has been approved.



Travis Castle, President of the Coon Rapids Development Group, is justly proud of the two residential subdivisions developed with City, Coon Rapids Municipal Utilities and other local financial support.

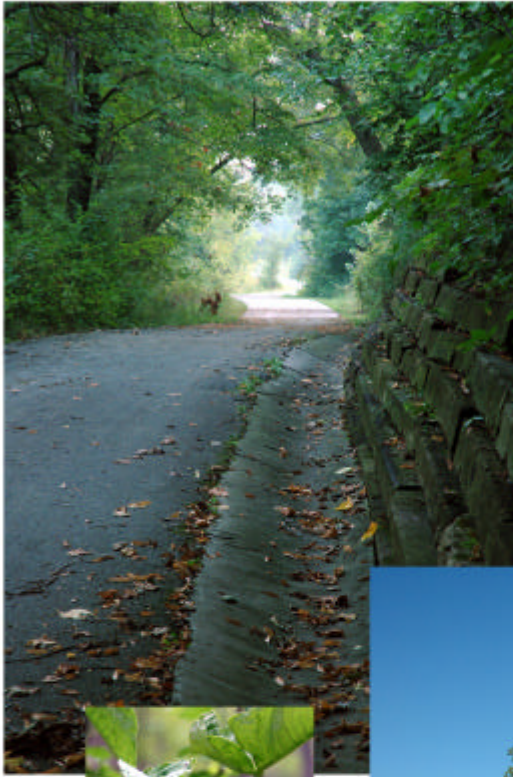
The completion of the Coon Rapids links of the American Discovery Trail will have a positive long-term impact on Coon Rapids, our neighboring towns and the entire western Iowa area.





## A Pleasing Environment

Our trails lead to treasures - large and small.





# A Pleasing Environment

Green spaces and fun places  
make Coon Rapids a great place to work and live.



We have a beautiful golf course  
and large and small public parks.



Beautiful homes and yards line  
our streets. Families that enjoy  
the natural environment have  
built country homes on the edge  
of town.





## A Strong Foundation



Modern facilities house our city offices, library, CRMU Operations Center and Medical Center

We are justly proud of our school and its sports complex. These facilities are co-located with the Aquatic Center Park.



Our housing base includes many remodeled older homes, condos for empty nesters and large and small modern new homes.





# Creative Culture

Public art dots our landscape. We want more, we need more.



Creativity springs from all segments of our population, including enterprising business leaders as well as artists, crafts people and home owners.





## ***IV. Opportunities***

Coon Rapids-Whiterock has the potential to become one of Western Iowa's Great Places. We offer the superlative gift of Whiterock Conservancy, whose size and richness of possibility are beyond compare. We offer a vibrant community with its own strong recreational potential, as well as local farmers, artists, and entrepreneurs ready to start a diverse array of creative ecotourism businesses. We offer our rich history and authentic sense of place.

Coon Rapids best asset, however, is its innovative, dynamic leadership. We offer forward-thinking, fearless leaders, ready to embrace the challenges of economic, technological and cultural change. New ideas, new approaches, and new people are always welcome here.

Truly dynamic leadership, of a caliber often not found in small rural communities, is found in all our main civic institutions: the city-owned Coon Rapids Municipal Utilities (CRMU), the Coon Rapids Development Group (CRDG), the Coon Rapids-Bayard Community School District (CR-B), and the city-owned Thomas Rest Haven. Further, these leaders enjoy the support and confidence of our fine mayor, Keith Dorpinghaus, of our town newspaper, and other community business leaders.

That strong local leadership has now been joined by the vision and the commitment of the board of Whiterock Conservancy, made up of some of the top environmental leaders of the state, including Mark Ackelson of Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Fred Kirshenmann of the Leopold Center, Mike Brandrup of the DNR, Bob Riley of the Des Moines Waterworks, and Liz Garst of Coon Rapids.

Besides local leadership, our community offers local buy-in and local resources. Foremost, of course, is the Garst Family gift of over \$6 million in land plus additional endowment funds for Whiterock. This stupendous gift is being made by local resident Mary Garst and her five daughters, including Coon Rapids residents Rachel and Liz Garst. The first land transfer was made in December 2004, and additional land and cash gifts will be made yearly for approximately the next ten years, until the overall total is reached.

But this is certainly not the only local investment in making Coon Rapids a great place! Over the last ten years, CRDG investment campaigns, TIF, and other community contributions have mobilized millions of dollars of local resources for community investments in elder care, the Aquatic Center, residential subdivisions, business development, and CR-B. A list of the investments of just the last two years (see Annex) constitutes an impressive testimonial to our town and its commitment to the future.

The change in community vision wrought by the newly-announced Whiterock project has just begun. Before now, our leaders were focused on business diversification and improving our quality of life in general; few people had the vision to see a strategic

economic future for our community based largely on ecotourism. It is a testament to the creativity and innovation of our local leadership has so quickly grasped the possibilities inherent in our new situation and moved to seize the current opportunity with such enthusiasm.

The community efforts that have produced this Great Places offer have been enormous, rich, diverse, and extremely exciting. The local “buy-in” and support have been tremendous. Together, we identified and analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of our community, forged a new common vision of the future, and sought to identify those strategic directions that will need to be followed to make that vision a reality.

The offer that follows is fairly short-term. Our Great Place Team operated largely within a five-year time horizon. For Whiterock, we focused on the urgent infrastructure and environmental work that must be done before we can realistically promote it for general public use. Also proposed for the short term, is a short, paved trail loop which starts and ends in the town of Coon Rapids. When planning is completed in early 2006, we will be ready to move forward immediately with these three projects.

Down the road Whiterock envisions many other components and investments, including a nature education center, an extensive restoration and research program, significant work in introducing new grazing regimes, an astronomy center, etc. But all that will all have to wait for in-depth, planning, resources, and additional staff. Right now we are concentrating our efforts to become a Great Place, through acquiring the minimum infrastructure needed to open to the public while also protecting fragile areas.

CRDG, meanwhile, is proposing to implement four projects. Its Business Development Committee, which is currently working on plans for an commercial-industrial park and developing a community marketing initiative, now will add a parallel thrust focused on ecotourism. With technical support from the state’s Great Place Team, this committee will finish developing an ecotourism promotion initiative that will involve providing our local entrepreneurs the technical, financial and marketing support they need to be successful.

In a parallel effort, the CRDG Beautification Committee is proposing to lead a two-year inter-institutional process to develop and implement a Green Plan for the community, in conjunction with the City, Whiterock and other area participants. Two immediate components of the larger plan are to help with City improvements to the Aquatic Center park and to reclaim a riverside brown field converting it to a greenway entrance at the east end of Main Street.

The third CRDG project is more long-term, as it involves developing about 70 miles of bike trails that will to connect Coon Rapids to Iowa’s developing trail systems. Progress has been slow without more state support, but there is hope that funds may be appropriated in the near future. The first leg will connect us with the Raccoon River Valley Trail and Herndon, 20 miles east of Coon Rapids.

Once the first three projects are well underway, the CRDG Executive Committee will turn its attention to the promotion and development of a Corn Museum in Coon Rapids. For the town to fully benefit from increased numbers of visitor, it needs a destination for tourists in the city business district. However, the cost of a high-caliber museum will be significant. Resource mobilization, especially the key step of generating the buy-in of corn industry leaders, will be difficult until Syngenta (the new owners of Garst Seed Company) finishes with its initial adjustments and decides on its level of interest in future investments in the community. We estimate that in two years we will be ready for the challenge of resource mobilization, and achieve the Corn Museum in five.

Finally, we have three community projects. Each is being led by a different institution with a track record of getting things done. The school wants to build on its 2003 survey of migrant and Latino needs, and the migrant outreach program of 2004, by hiring a community liaison whose duties include a special focus on Latino outreach. This will be a three-year position with goals of developing new programs and approaches which will increase school-community interaction and involvement.

The City clearly needs a larger fire station and ambulance facility, having long ago outgrown its current quarters. When the funds become available, it would not take long to identify a suitable spot, design and construct a new facility.

Finally, the Thomas Rest Haven board and staff never seem to rest. Now that they have built the medical clinic and therapy room, remodeled their dining area and purchased a van, they are ready to move forward with additional services for our older residents. Now the goal is to enable people to “age in place” with an assisted living complex and other home care support. Assisted living plans have been in the works for a while, and there are already indications of potential local support.

Together, these opportunities as detailed in the following sections can take us toward our vision of Coon Rapids - Whiterock as a Great Place that we can share with the rest of the state! We are ready to accept the enormous challenge and opportunity to fulfill our vision; and we look forward to support from the State’s Great Place Team to meet this challenge.

## **Our Offer**

### **Whiterock Start-Up Projects**

**2006-2007:** Initial signage, parking, sanitary facilities, and campsites enable the nonprofit Whiterock Conservancy to quickly open its main 4,300-acre tract to the general public.

**2006-2007** A 4-mile paved interpretive trail featuring fishing ponds, the historic Khrushchev visit house and restored wetlands connect to the Coon Rapids trail system and the Coon Rapids business district.

**2006-2007** Environmental inventories, the protection of remaining prairie remnants, and redesign of grazing pastures to enhance productivity while reducing the environmental degradation. These projects will lay the ground for future large-scale restoration efforts.

### **CRDG Rural Tourism Projects**

**2006-2010** Creative ecotourism businesses help make Whiterock an unrivaled destination area and boost area incomes and retail sales.

**2006-2008** Green Community planning helps protect and restore our greenways, parks, watershed and dark skies.

**2007-2010** Local and national trail connections to the east, north and southwest make Coon Rapids an important Iowa trail hub.

**2008-2010** A Coon Rapids Corn Museum connects us to our past, showcases two of our high-tech businesses, and serves as a Main Street destination spot.

### **Other Community Projects**

**2006-2008** A new bilingual CR-B school-community liaison improves school community relations, with a special focus on Latino integration.

**2007-2008** Our award-winning Thomas Rest Haven expands options for aging in place with independent and assisted living facilities, respite care, dementia care, and home care options.

**2008-2010** New city emergency facilities enable our community fire fighters and EMT volunteers to respond to increases in outdoor recreation tourism and prairie burns.



## Goal 1: Opening Whiterock Conservancy

### 1. Opening Whiterock for Public Access

<b>Date:</b>	September 20, 2005
<b>Duration:</b>	18 months (Jan 2006-June 2007)
<b>Institution:</b>	Whiterock Conservancy
<b>Contact Information:</b>	Liz Garst, Executive Director Whiterock Conservancy 1313 Fig Avenue Coon Rapids, IA 50058 tel. (712) 651-2015 email <a href="mailto:gresort@pionet.net">gresort@pionet.net</a>

**Goal:** In 18 months, open the Whiterock land base to the general public by putting in basic public access infrastructure that makes it accessible to a three-fold increase in visitors, including handicapped accessibility, while simultaneously protecting the area's natural resources.

**History & Justification:** The land area being donated to Whiterock Conservancy has been used by the local community for more than 100 years, including use for the last decade by the small private eco-tourism business Garst Farm Resorts which has been hosting approximately 4,000 overnight or day use visitors per year. Since overnight user numbers have been small, and all users have received a personal orientation by Resort staff, to date there has been no need for extensive investments in signage, parking, etc.

Whiterock's main 4,300 acre preserve currently has dozens of miles of unpaved internal trails. The main trail traversing the property from NW to SE is periodically mowed and is passable by gator (a small golf cart). Many other miles of narrower trails, basically deer trails, are passable by foot, horse, or mountain bike (see map).

**Trail Design.** Though extensive, the current Whiterock trail system suffers from poor design. Certain sections need to be rerouted to better protect natural areas, obtain lower grades and control erosion through "dip and roll" design standards promulgated by the International Mountain Bike Association. Highway crossings are not safe enough for general public use. Key segments near Coon Rapids need to be paved to provide general bike and wheel chair access and to control erosion in heavy-use areas. More entry points, and especially more long and short loops, would greatly increase recreational, educational and exercise-oriented use.

**Signage.** The current trail has no signage. To attract, direct and educate users, substantial investment in signage is needed. Signs are needed along the highway and

other local roads to direct visitors to the property. An information kiosk is needed along the highway to provide visitors with basic orientation to the local community, history, environment and agriculture, and provides maps of the trail and other relevant brochures. Directional signs are needed along all major trail routes. Perimeter signage along 30 miles of fence is needed to ensure that preserve users do not stray onto the private property of preserve neighbors. Interpretative signage and displays are needed at key environmental and scenic destinations to increase enjoyment of the trails and provide a family-oriented educational experience.

**Infrastructure.** The trail system also needs infrastructure: at least one parking area, bathrooms, and picnic areas. Camping facilities with electric hookups and a bathroom/shower facility are also needed for both horse owning and non-horse owning users.

With improved trails, signage and infrastructure, visitor numbers are projected to increase three-fold in the short term to 12,000 persons a year. Within 5 years 20,000 visitors a year and within a decade, when the Raccoon River Valley Trail, the Sauk Rail Trail and the T-Bone trails are connected through Coon Rapids, the projection rises to 50,000 per year.

**Objectives:** Provide the Whiterock preserve for near-term growth in public use.

**Activities:**

1. Re-work the route and/or grade of at least 5 miles of existing dirt trail segments. (The proposed paved sections are detailed in Section 1.2, Town Loop Trail.)
2. Design and erect directional signage to and through the trail system.
3. Design and construct an information kiosk along the highway, with an associated parking area, bathroom and picnic area.
4. Design and erect interpretative signage at key destinations along the trail.
5. Design and install perimeter signage.
6. Design and construct a camp ground, with electric hookups and a shower house/bathroom, to accommodate approximately 20 horse units and 20 non horse units.

**Outcomes:** Whiterock becomes accessible to the public and able to serve up to 12,000 visitors by mid-2007, and 20,000 by 2010 and 50,000 visitors per year within a decade.

**Local investors:** Whiterock has already hired the planning and consulting services of the firm Dunbar/Jones to develop a detailed landscape plan for Whiterock Conservancy over the winter of 2005-6. In addition, Whiterock is currently seeking up to \$100,000 from private donors and foundations for initial infrastructure improvements and will be soliciting donations for annual operating costs. Local Whiterock volunteers and the Central Iowa Trails Association will assist in dirt trail redesign.

**Possible partners:**

Iowa Department of Transportation

Iowa Department of Natural Resources  
Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs

**Budget:**

Public access coordinator	\$20,000
Dirt trail redesign ... equipment rental	\$20,000
Directional Signage to and through property	\$20,000
Information Kiosk/Shelter House and Displays	\$40,000
Kiosk Parking, Picnic Areas Landscaping and Amenities	\$30,000
Kiosk public restroom	\$25,000
Perimeter Signage	\$10,000
Interpretative signage along trail (design and construction)	\$30,000
Campground Showerhouse/Bathroom	\$50,000
Campground Electric Hookups	\$40,000
Campground roadway/parking (gravel)	\$10,000
Campground amenities (picnic tables, horse ties, firepits, etc.)	\$15,000
Campground landscaping	\$10,000
Total	\$320,000

## 2. Whiterock - Town Loop Trail

**Date:** September 20, 2005  
**Duration:** 2 years (2006-2007)

**Institutions:** Whiterock Conservancy  
City of Coon Rapids

**Contact persons:** Liz Garst, Executive Director  
Whiterock Conservancy  
1313 Fig Avenue  
Coon Rapids, IA 50058  
tel. (712) 651-2015  
email [gresort@pionet.net](mailto:gresort@pionet.net)

Keith Dorpinghaus, Mayor  
City of Coon Rapids  
123 3rd Street  
Coon Rapids, IA 50058  
tel.-712-999-9353

**Goal:** Develop a paved 4-mile loop trail through Whiterock Conservancy which joins Coon Rapids on both ends, and which provides handicap accessibility. The trail will bring users right into the Coon Rapids commercial district as well as to the historic Garst Farm/ Khrushchev house, fabulous fishing ponds, and several restored wetlands.

**History & Justification:** There is a really neat thing about the walking trail that hugs the Middle Raccoon River along the north and east boundaries of Coon Rapids: it makes residents remember that Coon Rapids was first a river town.

The early residents of Coon Rapids built their homes near a grist mill and a log and earthen dam on the river in the 1860s. They hunted and fished. A few rugged individuals established businesses, most notably the Garst Store and the Fort Sumpter hotel. Yet Coon Rapids did not really prosper until the railroad came in 1881. The Milwaukee Land addition was laid out a few blocks southwest of “old town” and the railroad company sold lots for businesses on the new Main Street. In 1884, the railroad was expanded to Council Bluffs, and grain elevators built along the tracks began to flourish.

The river has lost its economic importance to Coon Rapids but never its natural beauty. With the development of the river trail in the 1990s, local residents can now easily walk from a residential neighborhood, cross a suspension bridge and connect with the city’s early heritage, and a beautiful river bottom piece of land. Remnants of the old dam and the ice house are visible from the trail as it passes through Riverside Park, the site of many picnics and reunions over the past 100 years.

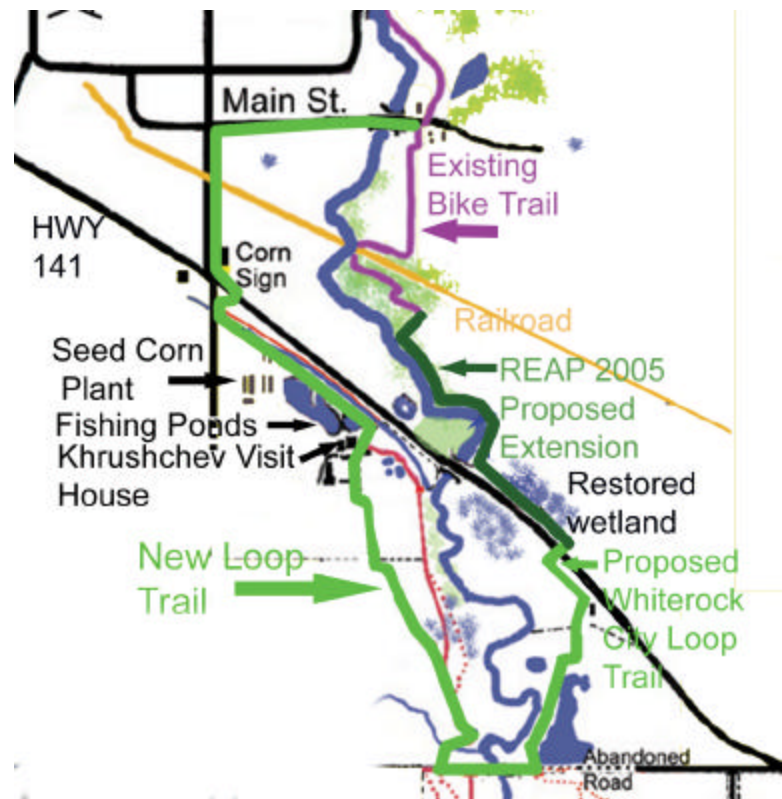
Riverside Park is a 144 acre park alongside the Middle Raccoon River which is owned and maintained by the Carroll County Conservation Commission. It contains a North-South 3.5 mile walking trail built with REAP funds in the 1990s, which borders the river for most of its trajectory. The Coon Rapids River Trail System is a wonderful excursion into diverse landscape surrounding Coon Rapids -- through timber, prairie, pastures, tree stands, and floodplains. It has three parking areas: on the north end, at Riverside Park, near the east end at the east end of Main Street and at county camping area.

Wonderful as it is, the trail would be much more valuable to local users and visitors if it were longer and made a loop. If the trail included nearby amenities such as restrooms, additional parking and access points, and interpretative and directional signage it would be even better. And of course, area businesses would benefit, if the trail brought users into the commercial district.

With Whiterock Conservancy starting on the southern edge of Coon Rapids and extending seven miles farther southeast along both sides of the Middle Raccoon River, the opportunity to extend the town trail to give the user a richer loop experience has now come. A route has been mapped to create a 4-mile paved loop that includes both key Conservancy attractions and the commercial district of Coon Rapids. This loop provides highway access points for the trail and also provides access to the dirt trail system which extends downriver through Whiterock. This project will more closely tie the Coon Rapids community with Whiterock Conservancy and will bring Conservancy users directly into the community where they will contribute to local retail sales.

As shown, Whiterock and City leaders have selected the route for initial development. The new trail will begin off the main access road through Coon Rapids (Highway 141) and connect at both ends to the existing town river trail.

On its west end, the trail would start at the main entry point to Coon Rapids (a parking lot and Farmers Market located next to the corn sign at the intersection of Highway 141 and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue). It would cross under Highway 141 through an existing pedestrian tunnel, emerging into a "pocket park", then crossing the creek, over a new bridge which is being planned. South of the creek, the trail will pass the beautiful fishing ponds built in the 1940s, when the creek was straightened. These ponds need to be developed with picnic tables, a handicap-accessible fishing pier,



drinking water and a restroom.

From the ponds the trail will pass by the historic Khrushchev-visit house, and then south along the river to the restored wetlands and prairie and onto an abandoned roadway. From this old roadway, four Whiterock dirt trails extend along both sides of the river. After crossing the river the trail will extend north to Highway 141.

City of Coon Rapids has just applied for a REAP Grant for the extension of the existing river trail's east end about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile south along the river to Highway 141. This extension is exciting since it traverses a wetland dam and thus gives spectacular views of wild bird populations such as migrating Trumpeter Swans and other native waterfowl.

The Whiterock-Town Loop Trail would pick up where that extension reaches the highway, just east of the River Bridge. A safe crossing would have to be devised. The trail would then go one mile south, through wetlands and past a lovely pond, past a planned osprey conning tower, to an abandoned road (the old dump road). The trail would cross the river on an old iron bridge, where it meets the other portion coming south from the Home Farm, and also with the Whiterock's dirt trail network.

Once the city trail extension and the Whiterock Town Loop Trail are completed, about 10 blocks of the loop route thereby created is not on trail per se, but on city streets (5<sup>th</sup> Ave north to Main Street, and then Main Street east to the river). The City of Coon Rapids will need to develop appropriate signage, bike parking, etc, to guide users through this section of the loop and to steer them back to where the trail picks up again.

At the Main Street trail access, Whiterock Conservancy owns two very small farm sheds, which will be developed as an interpretation site.

### **Objectives:**

Provide the public with a handicap accessible riverside trail loop which joins the town of Coon Rapids with Whiterock Conservancy. Ensure that the trail includes environmental educational displays, fishing, and other amenities.

### **Activities:**

- 1) Develop with paving and signage a 4-mile portion of Whiterock-Town Loop Trail with connections on both ends to the town of Coon Rapids. Of this, approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  miles will be developed using the 2005 REAP Grant, and  $\frac{3}{4}$  miles will be on city streets.
- 2) Equip the Garst Ponds with picnic tables, water hydrant, a composting toilet and a handicap accessible fishing pier. Improve pond road maintenance. Annually, stock ponds with fish, and control invasive vegetative growth. Patrol ponds and keep area cleaned up. Organize retired people and Fish Iowa volunteers to adopt the ponds and organize the fishing.
- 3) Design and install at least two interpretative signs along the trail describing dark skies, wetlands, Iowa ponds, etc. Design and install an interpretation site in existing farm buildings at the Main Street access point.

4) Purchase 4 gators (golf-cart type vehicles) which Whiterock can rent to trail users who are elderly or disabled, to enable them full access to the trail.

**Outcomes:** Trail usage will rise dramatically. Highway 141 trail access points will be much more visible to visitors than are the current trailheads buried right in the town. In addition, many more town residents will feel free to hike on Whiterock land and will have more route options than before. Walkers will have a longer and more varied route and bicyclists will have a long enough route to make it work their while to travel to our area. Local businesses will be supported as Whiterock visitors enter Coon Rapids at the East end of Main Street or at the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue entrance.

**Possible partners:**

Syngenta will be asked to authorize trail right a way alongside its South Plant.

The DNR will continue providing free stocking fish.

The Iowa Department of Latino Affairs will help coordinate Latino outreach and education on fishing opportunities and rules.

Iowa Department of Transportation or the REAP program will finance construction of the paved trail.

The Department of Cultural Affairs will assist in interpretative signage.

Guthrie County Conservation Department support for the project will be requested.

**Local investors:**

Whiterock Conservancy staff would administer the project and provide the land for most of the trail route. Whiterock is currently seeking up to \$100,000 from private donors and foundations for initial infrastructure improvements, including trail development, a portion of which might be available for financing this project. Whiterock will also be sponsoring an annual walkathon to assist in covering maintenance costs and obtaining community support. Volunteers will patrol the project area for garbage and legal compliance, and Fish Iowa local volunteers will promote fishing events for the public, especially children.

Whiterock has already hired the planning and consulting services of the firm Dunbar/Jones to develop a detailed landscape plan for Whiterock Conservancy over the winter of 2005-6. This firm will assist in final routing and planning for this trail. The Whiterock Public Education and Recreation Committee would help plan signage and educational displays. Whiterock will maintain the fishing ponds, and oversee gator rental.

The Garst Family put \$15,000 into its pond network in 2004-2005 providing for assessment, vegetative control, stocking and new bilingual signage. Whiterock Conservancy is budgeting \$6-8,000 annually for overall annual pond maintenance.

The City of Coon Rapids will include a bike path on the bridge in its budget to replace the 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. bridge across the creek. The city will also be responsible for trail signage, bike parking, etc. on that 10-block portion routed on city streets.

**Budget:**

2.5 mile paved bike trail @ \$100,000/mile (excludes 2005 segment)	\$250,000
Picnic tables, composting toilet, fishing pier at Home Farm Pond	\$50,000
Interpretative and directional signage	\$15,000
Interpretative display in old farm buildings, Main Street Access	\$25,000
4 gators @ \$6,250 each	\$25,000
Re-grade and re-rock Home Farm pond road	\$10,000
Total Fixed Cost	\$375,000



### 3 Environmental Inventory and Initial Rescue

**Project Title:** Environmental Inventory & Initial Rescue of Whiterock Diversity

**Institution:** Whiterock Conservancy

**Contact person:** Liz Garst

**Date:** September 20, 2005

**Duration:** 2006-2007

**Goals:**

Conduct essential inventory work on key indicator species and habitats. Save threatened prairie patches from woody encroachment. Re-design grazing pastures to enhance productivity while reducing environmental degradation.

**History and justification:**

Whiterock has suddenly come into management of a truly enormous and awesome piece of land. About one fourth is in timber, and there are also several excellent oak savannah remnants, as well as rare wet prairie along unusual side-hill seeps, sandstone outcroppings, and numerous fishing ponds. Significant portions of the timber and savannah areas are used as cattle pastures. Much of the rest is improved brome grass pasture and crop ground (much of which is currently enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program).

A 2004 plant community survey conducted by Dr. Thomas Rosburg of Drake University found over 4% of the tract in native plants (compared to just 0.5% for the state), and a full quarter of the area in oak forests providing important habitat for neo-tropical migrants and other forest-dwelling birds. Furthermore, Dr. Rosburg found five plants with a “conservatism coefficient” of 10, and 28 plants with a coefficient of 8 or higher. These represent native plants so specialized they flourish only in specific habitats. Approximately 400 plant species were identified, and there will no doubt be many more when detailed floristic inventories are completed.

Rosburg finds great value in the area as the westernmost extension of Iowa’s forests, and as such, critical habitat for many important animal species. Included in this group are rare birds already sighted in the area including the Long-eared Owl, Trumpeter Swans, Bald Eagles, Blue Herons, Broad-winged Hawks, Cooper’s Hawks, Scarlet Tanagers, Vireos, American Avocets, various warbler species, Bobolinks, and an accidental Vermilion Flycatcher.

**Objectives:**

Certain environmental work is needed with some urgency in order to complete initial planning. Rosburg recommended that a herpetology survey, a floristic inventory of the wetland seeps, and a detailed bird survey be completed, to better define high-priority

protection areas and to plan management regimes. Other inventory work, especially of insects and sand prairie and savannah areas is also recommended. Rosburg identified several rare prairie fragments which are threatened by woody encroachment. An immediate environmental threat is the cattle herd on the property, which is causing erosion and habitat degradation. A re-design of cattle pastures is needed, as the first step in developing more sustainable grazing regimes.

#### **Activities:**

- 1) Conduct a floristic inventory and assessment of wetlands, particularly the seeps and natural marshes, to gain a better understanding of species composition and management needs. This is the most unique habitat type in the Whiterock Valley.
- 2) Supplement, with professional oversight, current volunteer efforts to inventory migrating and breeding birds, to gain an understanding of bird use of habitats and the effect of management activities (prescribed fire, mowing, grazing) on bird abundance and reproduction.
- 3) Conduct a survey of reptiles and amphibians, especially in the wetland areas and in the rock and sandy outcrops, in order to gain a better understanding of species composition and management needs.
- 4) Remove brush and trees threatening to overtake the best prairie habitats. Priority sites identified in the Rosburg report include: P-5, P-7, P 10, P-12, P-18, P-19, UWS-19, and P-45. These prairie remnants are small but significant.
- 5) Inventory and assessment of general insect occurrence and distribution. Most important would be obtaining some data on key groups, such as butterflies, dragonflies, beetles, grasshoppers, that are associated with the wetlands, sand savanna. prairie communities, and oak forests.
- 6). Install water pipes to permit subdivision of grazing pastures into smaller units with temporary/moveable electric fencing systems. Install permanent gates so that public users of the property can traverse pastures without having to deal with electric fences. Smaller pasture units will significantly reduce soil erosion, lessen the habitat degradation from grazing, and increase feed utilization ... all initial steps in developing sustainable grazing regimes.

Note: An archeological/architectural survey, also needed for initial planning, has already been commissioned as part of the Dunbar/Jones planning contract.

#### **Budget:**

Floristic inventory of wetland areas (Rosburg quote)	\$6,500
Bird research work	\$10,000
Herpetology Survey (Dr. Christiansen quote)	\$6,500
Chainsaw/tractor crew to clear threatened prairie remnants	\$20,000
Insect surveys	\$10,000

Initial pasture re-design: water pipes, waterers, fencing, public gates	\$40,000
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$93,000</b>

**Local resources:** Rossberg Report already details initial plant communities, and volunteer birders have already conducted an initial species list and bird survey. Whiterock may also be able to recruit volunteers to work on the herpetology project, the insect survey, and the prairie rescue work. Whiterock supplies free lodging and transport to researchers as part of a protocol approved by the board. The pasture tenant, Doug Honald, has already hired a consultant who has recommended initial pasture re-design steps.

**Possible Partners:**

Whiterock Sustainability and Natural Resources Committees have already pulled together some of the top minds in Iowa to oversee the above projects.

DNR Bird Conservation Area Program, Audubon society, Saving Our Avian Resources (SOAR), Peasants Forever, the Federal EQIP program (for pasture improvements).  
ram, Audubon society, Saving Our Avian Resources (SOAR), Peasants Forever.

## **Goal 2: Rural Tourism**

### **4. Ecotourism Business Development**

**Date:** September 20, 2005

**Institution:** Coon Rapids Development Group Business Development Committee

**Contact Person:** Doug Carpenter, CRDG Business Development Committee Chair  
408 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Coon Rapids, IA 50058  
tel. (712)-999-9478  
email dpcarp@longlines.com

**Goals:** Promote ecotourism development for Coon Rapids through marketing, financial and technical support to entrepreneurs.

**History and Justification:** With a history as a company town, it is important that Coon Rapids develop a broad business base. During the last five years the Coon Rapids Development Group Business Development Committee has had a very successful track record in attracting new businesses to the area. A CRDG Representative recruited Precision Telemarketing of Philadelphia to locate in Coon Rapids, and in 2002, CRDG helped facilitate \$350,000 in low-interest loans and grants for the \$900,000 expansion of ET Video and its new facility.

More recently CRDG has been closely following the purchase of Garst Seed by Syngenta and offering to assist new management's facilitation of ongoing operations in the community. CRDG is also laying the groundwork for an Industrial and Commercial Development Zone to be located along Highway 141 on the city's western edge.

The Garst Family's donation of land to the White Rock Conservancy, along with the City's already excellent recreational opportunities, and plans for state-wide bike trail connections, have opened a whole new route for community development: ecotourism. For this reason starting in 2005, CRDG began to define ecotourism as one of its central business development initiatives.

Ecotourism will be a huge boost to depressed local retail sales that never fully recovered from the farm crisis of the 1980s. It will also give a boost to neighboring communities such as Dedham, Bayard, portions of the four counties surrounding Coon Rapids: Carroll, Greene, Guthrie and Audubon.

The CRDG Ecotourism Initiative will accordingly work to implement and refine the projects defined below.

Possible partners include a wide range of local participants including the CRMU, CRDG, City of Coon Rapids, White Rock Conservancy, local business people, IEDC, Region 12

COG, Circle West Incubator, Iowa Value Fund, Iowa Main Street Program, Downtown Resource Center, Department of Public Safety, Iowa Arts Council, State Farm Insurance, Department of Transportation, REAP, DNR, IDED, Coon Rapids Foundation, and Main Street Iowa.

Area	Projects	Est. Costs
Ecotourism Financial & Technical Support	Provide an annual award for the most innovative and feasible ecotourism development plan. Provide grants and loans for new ecotourism entrepreneurs. Provide planning and marketing support for ecotourism entrepreneurs. Make a development/marketing expert available to local business people. Promote local tours of ethanol plant, corn plant, interesting farms, raptor rehabilitation, blacksmith shop, etc. - Advertise the Coon Rapids - White Rock Great Place with brochures at rest stops, signs on state vehicles, special lottery tickets, etc.	\$50,000
Central Artisan Retail Facility	Implement a central facility where local artisans can work and sell their wares and where other local and state-made products can be sold.	\$200,000
Promote Hotel & Restaurant	-Encourage hotels and restaurants to invest in Coon Rapids. Make use of the area at the intersection of 5 <sup>th</sup> Ave and Highway 141 for ecotourism business (welcome center, motel, restaurant, art center, etc.)	To be determined.
Regional Marketing	-Develop a "shop local" brochure and internet tour, covering routes from Des Moines, Ames & interstate 80/Omaha to Coon Rapids. (Develop and market jointly with Elk Horn, Perry, and Manning etc.) -Ensure web-links with other regional tourist destinations. -Work with Carroll, Guthrie Center, Springbrook, and Lake Panorama for protection and tourist development of the Middle Raccoon watershed. -Promote dark skies at a regional level. -Promote joint initiatives with Living History Farms. -Include Bayard in ecotourism development efforts.	\$10,000 annually
Promotion of Quality of Life	Promote Coon Rapids to astronomers as having some of the darkest skies in Iowa. Foster Coon Rapids as a bedroom community and retirement location.	0

	Promote Coon Rapids to bird watchers. -Promote “Returnees” effort	
Improve Roads Safety and Dust in Heavily Traveled Areas.	Pave Fig Ave from 141 to River House. (Primary route to White Rock area). Improve River House road/river crossing to reduce current high danger of car-pedestrian-horse accidents. Reduce speed limit from ethanol plant into Coon Rapids & add more deer warnings. Design HWY 141 bike trail crossing to maximize safety.	To be determined.
Signage to Improve Communications with Visitors.	Define and install signage for connected trail systems including Main Street portion. Design and implement a new welcome message for revolving corn cob sign. Install improved signage at current town RV park and new local attractions as they are developed. Distribute maps and brochures at welcome center, sales center, and stores. Main Street informational kiosk with a large map about the trail system, park information, and information on camping/sleeping accommodations. Install new Main Street streetscaping including new street lights, inlaid brick designs and artwork in sidewalks, metal arches and signage which incorporates all the attributes of our great place such as: wildlife, stalks of corn, bicycles, etc.	\$150,000
More Public art in Coon Rapids and Art Better Integrated in Social and Cultural life.	Build iconic sculpture east of Coon Rapids (Lone Tree Hill) Provide opportunities to display arts and crafts in the municipal building. Offer yearly commissions for installation and maintenance of public art. Hold annual art exhibits in the library. Encourage area businesses and homeowners to display public art at their places of business or in their yards. Provide links to local artists and artisans on the “About Coon Rapids” website. Provide art classes as part of adult education initiative. Incorporate artisans into community activities (church camp, etc.) Increase art categories and art demonstrations at county fair (quilts, blacksmithing, wood working, etc). Enhance art curriculum and resources at the CR-B School	\$20,000 annually
Involve youth in Ecotourism	Award annual youth internships with area businesses and nonprofits Sponsor an annual ecotourism entrepreneur contest and awards	\$20,000 annually

**Outcomes:** Three urban businesses will be added by the end of 2007 on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Main Street Greenways, and Main Street visitors and shoppers will increase by 50%. In addition, within two years the initiative will contribute to the formation of at least five rural businesses.

The Conservancy will continue to help market SOAR and private farm visits.

In addition, with the donation of Garst Farm Resorts to Whiterock Conservancy (scheduled for early 2006) it is envisioned that numerous services currently offered by the private Garst business will be outsourced to local entrepreneurs. This will open new business opportunities in the areas of food catering, event organization, horse-back riding lessons, guided trail rides, RV parking, etc.

**Local investment:** CRDG raises approximately \$30,000 a year from local businesses and supporters for community development. A portion of those assets may be invested in the activities described in this project.

## 5. A “Green” Community

**Date:** September 20, 2005

**Duration:** Green Plan Development in two years (2006 and 2007)  
plus implementation of specific projects:  
? Brown field property purchase and clean-up (2007)  
? Aquatic Center shelterhouse (2007)

**Institution:** CRDG Beautification Committee

**Contact person:** Charles Nixon, Chair  
c/o Coon Rapids Enterprise  
Main Street  
Coon Rapids, IA 50058  
tel. 712-999-6397  
email nixnlake@pionet.net

**Goal:** CRDG’s Beautification Committee, together with The City of Coon Rapids, Whiterock Conservancy and Coon Rapids Municipal Utilities, develops a Green Plan for Coon Rapids focused on greenway development, watershed protection, and protection of the area’s unusually dark skies.

The planning effort would spin off two individual projects, 1) the purchase and clean-up of a brown field area along the river at the east end of Main Street. And 2) and a new shelter house at the Aquatic Center Park.

Two components which will certainly be brought to the table will be dark skies and watershed protection. Dark Sky promotion efforts are already underway, led by Whiterock Conservancy and the local astronomy club, and river restoration projects have already been undertaken by the Middle Racoon River Watershed Foundation, Iowa Paddlers Association and others.

**History and Justification:** A green community recognizes itself as a system whose goal is to maintain its physical health and environmental sustainability over time. Monitoring of system elements and proactive planning encourage maximum resource savings, health, environmental diversity, and protection.

The first step in becoming a green community is development of a comprehensive “green plan,” drawn up by a team of experts from diverse state agencies with input from diverse area interests. Participants would include the City of Coon Rapids, Coon Rapids Municipal Utilities (CRMU), Whiterock, and may also include Lake Panorama, Racoon River Watershed Foundation, Saving Our Avian Resources, Pheasants Forever, and other nonprofit organizations.



It is anticipated that the green planning process will evolve over two years as consultants are brought in to evaluate and formulate plans for different aspects of an environmentally healthy community. The group would look carefully at waste creation and management issues, energy use and sources, potential chemical and biological hazards, safety and accident records, health and disease statistics, water and air quality, parks and green spaces, and the health and fitness of the population.

This green plan would serve as input for the City Council for city projects, ordinances, and for the next update of its zoning and land use plans (last revised in 2002). It would also help guide planning and public interest efforts of CRDG, Whiterock, and others.

A few central elements of the Green Plan are already clear. One is the creation and improvements of parks and greenways into the community, in particular at the East end of Main Street (where the bike path from the East will eventually come into town) and the main 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue gateway off of Highway 141.

The first would require the purchase and clean-up of a riverside property covered with trees grown up around rubble and junked machinery and equipment. This riverside lot, which borders Main Street on the south, has suspected surface contamination from motor oil or other substances which may require to be clean-up, depending on a DNR evaluation of the property. At least \$50,000 would need to clean it up and give it minimum development as a greenway.

Another would be to build a shelter house at Aquatic Center Park and add more picnic tables so it can serve larger crowds and help draw users to the Aquatic Center and its large park.

For the Coon Rapids-Whiterock area, other valued natural resources would include the watershed and the water quality of the Middle Raccoon River and the area's unusually dark skies, among others. Projects are likely to arise in these two areas, as well.

#### **ELEMENTS OF COON RAPIDS AREA GREEN PLAN**

<b>Goal</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Budget Estimate</b>	<b>Potential Partners</b>
Park usage	Continue restoration of Riverside Park begun in 2005 (\$5,000 already invested locally)	2,000	Carroll County Conservation Board CRDG Enhancement
Park usage	Build shelter house at Aquatic Center Park and add more picnic tables so it can serve larger crowds and help draw users for the Aquatic Center.	80,000	City of Coon Rapids area businesses
Inviting entry	Improve green space and visual environment at 5 <sup>th</sup> Ave entrance (already have \$15,000 Living Roadways can apply for more).	15,000	
Encourage alternative transport	Bike and gator signage and parking on Main Street and town entrances.	5,000	
Brownways to greenways	Purchase and clean-up 15 acre Alex property next to river & bike path at east entrance to Main Street.	\$60,000	-City of Coon Rapids -CRDG

	Steps: Evaluate surface contamination hazard. Purchase lot (\$5,000); dozer work (\$18,000), (\$18,000), timber & landscaping (\$10,000), gravel drive (\$5,000), etc.		-DNR
Beauty	City improves weed control on streets and sidewalks County improves weed control on bike trail (pushing thru pavement). Volunteer groups improve maintenance of public plantings. Additional plantings in unsightly or barren areas. Sponsor beautiful garden contests. Make better use of our master gardeners for advice and training. Help conduct prairie burns	5,000	-CRDG -Garden Club -FFA
Dark skies protection	City of Coon Rapids dark sky ordinance Obtain certification as dark sky community Dark sky education campaign Promote dark sky ordinances in Carroll, Audubon, Greene and Guthrie counties, and in the cities of Perry and Carroll Subsidized sale of dark-sky friendly lighting units to area residents and businesses. Work with REC to offer farmers dark-sky friendly yard lights.	10,000	Whiterock  Dark Skies Association  Astronomy Club
Middle Raccoon River water quality & watershed protection	Iowa water quality volunteers monitor the Middle Raccoon river & Whiterock creeks and ponds, and track sources of river pollution (fertilizers, hog manure, sewage, etc.) Partner with Iowa whitewater coalition and Iowa paddlers association on river rescue project. Middle Raccoon River Foundation does outreach to area residents & farmers on practices to protect water quality (limit fertilizer applications, buffer strips, etc.) and restore wetlands.	TBD	Whiterock  Middle Raccoon River Watershed Foundation  DNR  County Conservation
Health Obesity, Exercise and nutrition	Review school policies on candy and soda sales. Include more fresh produce in school lunch and day care programs. Adult healthy cooking/weight-loss class or newspaper column Install a warm therapy pool for year around use at Thomas Rest Haven. More adult & senior exercise opportunities (informal adult sports groups, walking club, exercise classes, yoga). Establish TV free youth center & help publicize harm of TV for children and adults. Improved community access to CR-B School weight rooms and gyms.	TBD	CR-B School  Thomas Rest Haven  St. Anthony's Hospital  CR-B Weight Losers Club
Institutional strengthening	Evaluation and restructuring of CRDG (hire assistant). Get Coon Rapids Foundation in place.	5,000	CRDG REL

	Create and maintain a central community file of grant opportunities & a volunteer pool of residents with grant-writing experience and abilities. Evaluation and restructuring of CRDG to increase participation.		Region XII DMAAC
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## 6. Regional Bike Trail Hub

**Institution:** CRDG Beautification Committee

**Date:** September 20, 2005

**Duration:** 2007-2010

**Contact person:** Charles Nixon, CRDG Beautification Committee  
c/o Coon Rapids Enterprise  
504 Main Street  
Coon Rapids, Iowa 50058  
tel. (712) 999-6397  
email nixnlake@pionet.net

**Goal:** Develop trail connections to make Coon Rapids and Whiterock the central hub on Iowa and nation-wide trail networks, by connecting to the Raccoon River Valley Trail System to the east, the Sauk Rail Trail to the north, and the T-Bone Trail to the SW, which will also put Coon Rapids on the cross-country Discovery Trail. Bicycle traffic will provide increased retail revenue for local businesses in the form of bike rentals and gear, refreshments, overnight lodging, restaurant service, etc., as Coon Rapids continues to market itself as a destination location.

**History and Justification:** With the breadth and scope of Whiterock Conservancy and its expansive trail network, and proximity to three neighboring trail systems, Coon Rapids has a tremendous opportunity to become a regional trail hub for Iowa.

Nearby trail systems include the Raccoon River Valley Trail System that runs from Waukee to Jefferson; the Sauk Rail Trail that runs from Swan Lake in Carroll to Blackhawk State Park near Lake View, and the T-Bone Trail that runs from Cass County to Brayton. The partially completed 6800 mile American Discovery Trail, which will span the continent from east to west, runs through Coon Rapids over the Raccoon River Valley Trail and T-Bone trails.

As these trails are completed history shows that bikers and other nature enthusiasts will come. Lanesboro, Minnesota is one prime example of what trail development can do for a community. In Lanesboro, trails have aided in the attraction to the area, retailers have taken advantage of the biking and hiking enthusiasts, offering them an array of additional services from restaurants to antique shops, to quality hotel and motel accommodations. Coon Rapids also has real potential as an important hub like that of Lanesboro. Bayard, Bagley, Dedham and other towns in our region will benefit economically as ecotourism opportunities spring up along the trail routes.

The most exciting, and highest prioritized element for Coon Rapids trail enthusiasts is the potential for connecting to the Raccoon River Valley Trail near Herndon. That's because

most of the trail corridor has already been established. When the Milwaukee Railroad went bankrupt in the early 1980s, the grain co-op in Bayard partnered with Community Grain in Coon Rapids -- and in order to maintain rail service -- bought the rail line from Herndon to Council Bluffs. Calling themselves "Shippers Consortium," the partnership leased the line to Burlington Northern, with the BN negotiating a option to buy after 20 years.

Very early on, the stretch from Bayard to Herndon was abandoned, and only a small percentage of adjoining landowners (less than 10%), acted to gain back their share of the railroad track right-of-way. The remainder of track right-of-way is still owned by Shippers's Consortium whose principal officer has indicated his willingness to extend permanent easements across the land for a bike trail.

Once the connection with the Raccoon River Valley Trail is completed or perhaps even before, there would likely be high interest in Carroll and Audubon to get the T-Bone and Sulk Rail trails connected with the Coon Rapids trail and the Raccoon River Valley Trail. The planning, engineering and implementation of these trails will be spread out over a period of years.

Implementation of the trails will be accomplished by teams with participants from Coon Rapids and other towns along the trail routes, Carroll, Guthrie and Audubon Counties, town, DOT, DNR, the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and other state-level public and private organizations.

***Herndon:*** In order to connect Coon Rapids with Bayard, and thus Bayard with Herndon, the proposed trail would have to extend down the existing railroad tracks. Our planners will need to work with BN to extend permission to build a trail on the right of way.

This trail will probably require state or federal funding. The county conservation commission for years has been unable to get funding for resurfacing their existing 10.2 mile trail built in 1989, and has other longstanding priorities that have preceded the new Whiterock opportunity. In addition, the Guthrie County supervisors are conservative when it comes to trails, in part because of the required maintenance and commitment for trails.

***Carroll:*** Determining a corridor to connect with the Carroll Sauk Trail would be a challenge. One possible route to the trail would be to follow the Burlington Northern track through the communities of Dedham, Templeton and even as far west as Manning, before heading back north and east into Carroll. Other possible routes would follow road right-of-ways.

***Audubon:*** The planned connection to the T-Bone trail in Audubon is routed along road right-of-ways. Final planning and engineering must be accomplished prior to building the connection. Once this connection is complete a new segment of the cross-country American Discovery trail will extend from Des Moines to south of Atlantic.

**Objectives:** With state and regional partners, build bike trails to connect the city of Coon Rapids with state wide trail networks at the cities of Herndon 20 miles to the East, Carroll 25 miles to the North and Audubon 25 miles to the Southwest.

**Activities:**

Establish an ongoing Regional Bike Trails Committee  
Get training from Iowa National Heritage Foundation  
Meet with county conservation commissioners/supervisors  
Meet with state representatives  
Locate grant possibilities  
Write and submit grants.  
Review and define route.  
Smooth, gravel and pave trails.  
Plan, design and place trail signage.  
Ensure maintenance money for the trails.

**Outcomes:** An expected increase number in tourists visiting the towns of Coon Rapids and Bayard will “bump-up” retail sales and allow new ecotourism business to thrive.

**Timeline:**

2007	20 miles East to Herndon
2008	25 miles North to Carroll.
2010	25 miles Southwest to Audubon

**Possible partners:** The state needs to take the lead role via the Iowa Department of Transportation, Iowa DNR, or other funding avenues. Nevertheless the commitment of county supervisors and conservation boards will also be needed, as well as the commitment of cities to develop amenities and facilities along the route.

**Local supporters:** Iowa Savings Bank, CRDG Enhancement Committee

**Budget:** Approximately \$700,000.

## 7. Corn Museum

**Date:** September 20, 2005

**Duration:** Five years (2006-2011)

**Institution:** CRDG Executive Committee

**Contact person:** Travis Castle  
President of CRDG  
Municipal Building

**Goal:** Create a Corn Museum which keeps us in touch with our unique history while serving as a destination attraction for area visitors. The facility would be located at the center of Coon Rapids and serve as a destination point for town visitors. Meeting rooms and a gift shop open to local artisans increase the interface between the community and the Corn Museum.

**History and Justification:** This Corn Museum/Community Center project was first proposed in 1990, then shelved when a new American Legion Community Building was erected. Circumstances today are different. The seed corn plant has been joined by Tall Corn Ethanol. The Garst Family history has continued with the donation and founding of Whiterock. Coon Rapids has a real future as a rural tourism destination, and the history of agriculture is one of the items in our offer. Whiterock, for example, plans to create exhibits about the habit and land use history of the Middle Raccoon River Valley.

**Objectives:** Raise the money and work with professional designers and educators to create a world class corn museum featuring the genetics of hybrid corn, the founding and evolution of the Garst and Thomas Seed Corn Company, the Khrushchev visit and its significance, the impact of corn on economic life, the ethanol industry, etc.

**Activities:**  
Plan museum  
Fundraise for museum  
Build museum  
Design exhibits for museum  
Maintain and run museum  
**Outcomes:**

**Timeline:** 5 year

**Budget:** \$2 million

**Local investors:** Tall Corn Ethanol, Syngenta, local banks, local businesses

**Possible partners:** Iowa Historical Society, REAP Historical Preservation, State Historical Institute, Iowa State University (repository for Garst papers), Iowa Corn Growers Association.



### **Goal 3: An Inclusive, Caring Community**

#### **8. Bilingual School-Community Liaison**

**Date:** September 20, 2005

**Duration:** Three years (2006-2009)

**Institution:** Coon Rapids-Bayard Community School District

**Contact person:** Shawn Zanders  
CR-B High School Principal and Equity Officer  
500 North Street  
Coon Rapids, IA 50058  
tel. 712-999-2208  
email shawnzanders@coon-rapids.k12.ia.us

**Goals:** The Coon Rapids-Bayard school employs a full-time coordinator to strengthen school-community relations, with special attention to the integration of the area's growing Latino population.

**History and justification:** The Coon Rapids Bayard community school district is a vital part of our communities. Formed in 1988 via the merger of the previously separate Coon Rapids and Bayard school districts, the school currently serves 520 students a year from the two communities and their surrounding rural areas.

The school, like so many other rural school districts, is currently experiencing several challenges, including sagging enrollment and the numerous mandates imposed by the No Child Left Behind legislation. Budgets are being tightened and administrators and teachers are constantly learning to do more with less. The school consequently needs local support.

Business development efforts, town marketing campaigns, and a welcoming attitude towards new Iowans are crucially important to help increase and maintain enrollment. Latinos have become an increasingly important part of enrollment.

Community support is also needed in the volunteer area. Tutors are needed to offer one-on-one assistance to individual children who are struggling, so that they can be brought back up to grade level in the core subjects.

Precision Telemarketing and Foster Grandparents program volunteer their time to work with struggling students. An active PTO has undertaken numerous activities in support of the school the last couple of years, including TV Turn Off Week, author visits, Santa's Workshop, and others. Numerous parents assist with school sponsored sport programs, as well as soccer league which is allowed to use school sports facilities.

All these activities would benefit from better coordination, and in some cases could be expanded. The liaison person could make recommendations to increase such support and make it work more smoothly. To the extent that the community coordinator might identify additional sources of support, this person might be able to raise funds to continue with these community integration efforts.

A special area of emphasis is that of Latino relations. In 2002, the CR-B School contracted local consultant Rachel Garst to carry out an in-depth needs survey on needs of CR-B School Migrant and Latino students. The survey identified urgent special needs of this population in the areas of housing, child-care, food assistance, language barriers, and schooling. On the basis of these findings, in 2003, CR-B, the CRDG Diversity Committee, and the food pantry worked together to carry out an extensive migrant services program, including a welcome picnic, a “rent-to-migrant” campaign, an odd jobs central, culturally appropriate food assistance, etc.

The study also identified educational issues, including lack of Latino parental involvement in education, the need for increased anti-bullying measures, and the special needs of students who do not speak English. CR-B has had English as a Second Language program in the primary school for 3 years now, but does not have any primary school employees who speak any Spanish. More needs to be done in terms of Latino family outreach and having at least a minimum Spanish language capacity available for primary school teachers and students.

In 2003 -also in response to the growing Latino presence in our community- the CRDG organized a Human Relations committee. Besides assisting in support of the migrants, this Committee seeks to foster intercultural understanding by promoting the integration of the towns Latino residents into the CRDG and other social organizations, by providing a free weekly Spanish class to all adult residents of Coon Rapids, and advises local businesses on language and Latino relations issues.

Currently, the Committee is seeking to establish a volunteer-staffed Spanish language program for all primary school classrooms, but needs additional assistance in coordinating instruction times, materials development, and integration with ongoing curriculums. The new CR-B School Liaison would play a vital role in helping to get this proposed volunteer effort off the ground.

**Activities:** Hire a full-time bilingual employee for a three-year pilot project to make recommendations and to carry out initiatives to develop and strengthen the following activities:

1. General School Community Coordination, including recruit volunteers (to assist in classroom instruction, field trips, building and ground maintenance, sports events, etc.) and organizing for students to volunteer and intern at area businesses and nonprofits.

2. Latino Outreach & Diversity Promotion, including translating as needed for primary school students and teachers, outreach to Latino parents, coordination with CRDG Diversity Committee, and helping to organize English tutors for new Iowans struggling with the language, diversity training for CR-B staff and students, publication of CR-B report on Migrant and Latino needs and efforts to date.

**Potential partners:** Before the position is created and filled, additional consultations would be undertaken with the Area Education Agency, Iowa Division of Latino Affairs, the CRDG Diversity Committee, and the current student volunteer coordinators, to ensure the position best responds to current needs. Other actors would include the PTO, Whiterock Conservancy, Congregate meals, and Coon Rapids Spanish Club.

**Local investors:** Local support will be solicited from CR-B Educational Foundation, local businesses, and CRDG, but the main local investment will be the actual time of the volunteer coordinated through this effort.

**Budget:** \$30,000/year

## 9. New Fire & Ambulance Facilities

**Date:** September 20, 2005

**Duration:** 2 years (2008 and 2009)

**Institution:** City of Coon Rapids

**Contact person:** Keith Dorpinghaus, Mayor  
Julie Ruggles, City Clerk. tel. 999-7794  
Municipal Building  
123 3<sup>rd</sup> Street  
Coon Rapids, IA 50058

Jeff Hachmeister, Fire Chief  
Fire Department Business Office, tel. (712) 999-5111  
Paulette McDonough, Ambulance Director (712) 999-5713  
4<sup>th</sup> and Main Street  
Coon Rapids, IA 50058

**Goals:** Build a new fire station and ambulance facility in Coon Rapids to enable its volunteer fire and ambulance departments to continue to meet emergency needs with an anticipated increase in recreational visitors.

**History and justification:** The current Fire Station is located at 4<sup>th</sup> and Main in an old building behind the ambulance office. The City owns seven working fire trucks, but current space is too small for their storage. Just four trucks fit in the fire station garage. Two trucks are stored in the ambulance facility garage and one is stored on the street behind the building. Parking space is so restricted that it has even prevented the City from purchasing larger trucks. The fire station building does have a meeting room but lacks storage space for gear and extra equipment.

Ambulance service is a joint Carroll County city effort. Carroll County owns the ambulance and provides ambulance upkeep, supplies and training for the crew, as well as a small stipend to the crew for carrying the pager.

The City of Coon Rapids provides the ambulance building and the director. The Ambulance facility is located at the old City Hall built in 1911. This is located at 4<sup>th</sup> and Main Street, is inadequate for current and projected needs. The ambulance office is small, leaks, and does not have meeting or training rooms.

The Coon Rapids ambulance department has existed since 1974. There is a paid full-time city ambulance director and about 20 volunteers (16 EMTs and 8 drivers).

The ambulance director's responsibilities include scheduling the crew, assuring that the ambulance unit is packed and ready to go at all times, taking calls from 4 a.m. to 6 p.m.

during the weekday; the director also is the ADA (American with Disabilities Act) representative for Coon Rapids, giving CPR instruction, and giving continuing education classes to the ambulance crew, teaching exercise classes at congregate meals, and runs the medical equipment loan closet (crutches, walkers, wheelchairs, commodes, etc.), taking blood pressure for individuals, businesses and congregate meals.

In 2004, the ambulance crew responded to 140 calls, ranging from possible cardiac, car accidents, other accidents, other medical conditions. The number of calls has been increasing every year. Demands for fire and emergency services will increase as the area experiences increases in controlled prairie burns and outdoor recreation activities.

As the number of calls increases, there is a need to relocate fire and ambulance facilities away from center of town. Their current location at 4<sup>th</sup> and Main across from the grocery store is one of the busiest intersections in town, with much slow-moving Main Street traffic.

**Objectives:** Modern fire and ambulance facilities, appropriately located with sufficient parking, storage and training space.

**Activities:**

Complete facility design

Acquire land

Contract for and build the new facility

**Budget:** \$150,000-\$200,000

**Local Investors:** City of Coon Rapids can sell previous facilities (old 1911 City Hall and building behind it).

**Possible partners:** City of Coon Rapids, Coon Rapids Volunteer Fire Department, Coon Rapids Ambulance Department, Region XII Council of Government, USDA Rural Development, Orange Township, Union Township

## **10. More Options for Elders**

**Date:** September 20, 2005

**Institution:** Thomas Rest Haven

**Contact Person:** Mary Jane Venteicher  
Administrator, Thomas Rest Haven

**Goal:** Improved quality of life for our seniors, via expanded options for “aging in place” including skilled nursing care, independent and assisted living, respite care, dementia care and home care.

**History and justification:** Thomas Rest Haven, a 64 bed skilled nursing facility, was built in 1968 by the Thomas Foundation of Coon Rapids and gifted to the city of Coon Rapids fully furnished and operational. The facility was state of the art then and has had dedicated care and updating over the ensuing years overseen by an elected board of Trustees. In 2000 a medical clinic and therapy room addition was completed to ensure that the community had access to medical services and outpatient therapy. Today, under arrangement with St. Anthony Regional Hospital, a full time family practice physician with X-ray and laboratory equipment provides services to the surrounding community. Physical, occupational and speech therapy services are available on an outpatient basis. Additionally the facility offers respite services to families and caregivers who might need to place a loved one for short periods of time. Recently the facility completed a \$500,000 dining room addition and front entrance and business office renovation. In May the facility received the 2005 Governor’s Award for Quality Care. Over the last 5 years there has been interest by the Trustees and by the community of Coon Rapids to expand the senior living options that are available to allow residents to remain here as they age, including independent and assisted living and dementia care.

### **Objectives:**

To provide a full spectrum of elder care alternatives, allowing local residents to remain in their own community while having choice of care options.

### **Activities:**

Construct a 12 unit assisted/independent living addition to the facility.  
Build a warm therapy pool possibly as part of the Thomas Rest Haven or Medical Center  
Expand Thomas Rest Haven services to include dementia care and home care.

### **Outcomes:**

Aging in place facility housing 10 residents in independent and assisted living by the end of 2007.

**Timeline:** Feasibility studies are underway at present. Construction would be initiated in 2006. Occupation of facilities would be initiated by the end of 2007.

**Local resources:** Thomas Rest Haven Administrator and Trustees, Coon Rapids Development Group, Local Residents

**Possible partners:** CRDG, City of Coon Rapids, CRMU, Local Residents, Coon Rapids Foundation, Local Financial Institutions

**Budget:** \$2,000,000

## ANNEXES

### 1. GREAT PLACES PROCESS AND TEAM

This great places document reflects an extensive process of consultation, brainstorming, visioning and prioritization that involved dozens of local and environmental leaders.

Many different segments were involved: those born here and those who have recently moved here; elder residents and our youth, farmers and town folks, whites and Latinos; elected representatives and natural leaders. Additional institutions to receive Great Places presentations were the City Council, Rotary, and the Whiterock board.

The following members of the Whiterock-Coon Rapids Community served as team members and consultants.

Barb Halverson	Co-owner of ET Video
Bill Jahn	City Council member, organic farmer
Brad Honold	CRMU, CRDG
Charles Carpenter	owner/operator of Prairie Song Apiary and Orchard, guest editorial writer in Des Moines Register
Chuck Offenberger	Raccoon River Valley trail
Dan Brutsche	Farmer, Board of Iowa Corn Growers Association
Dave Altman	Garst Seed employee
Diane Slater	Aquatic Center Director, Highschool Spanish teacher
Doug Carpenter	retired Air Force, potter, chair of CRDG Business Development Committee and keep of the “About Coon Rapids” website
James Thacker	new resident, mental health professional
Jeanna Clayburg	ET Video
Jessica Trevino	Latina resident of Coon Rapids
Joe Barron	Region XII, Carroll
John Hyland	Community Insurance Agency
Jon Judson	Middle Raccoon River Watershed Foundation, Diversity Farms (Dedham)



Joni Penfold	blind person
Julie Ruggles	City Clerk
Keith Dorpinghaus	Mayor of Coon Rapids
Kelly Hays	Employee of Tall Corn Ethanol and head of the CRDG Enhancement Committee
Laura Lake	CRDG beautification committee walker, Glidden middle school teacher
Liz Garst	Executive Director of Whiterock Conservancy, CRDG board,
Margie Pina	Latina resident of Coon Rapids, employee of ET video Member of the CRDG Diversity Committee
Mark Asmus	Farmer, mechanic, Whiterock sustainability committee; Whiterock land-management and GIS volunteer.
Mary Jane Veinteicher	Director of Thomas Rest Haven
Paulette McDonough	City ambulance and EMT Director
Rachel Garst	author and activist; chair of CRDG Diversity Committee, Whiterock Volunteer Outreach Coordinator
Sandra Altman	victim advocate, member of CRDG Diversity Committee
Shawn Zanders	CR-B High school principal and equity officer
Tony Pina	Latino resident of Coon Rapids Member of CRDG Diversity Committee Garst Seed employee (at Slater facility)
Travis Castle	Director of CRMU, head of CRDG

## **2. COON RAPIDS ORGANIZATIONS**

### **CITY ELECTED BODIES**

CRMU Board (appointed by City Council)  
City Council  
School Board

### **COUNTY ELECTED BODIES**

Carroll County Supervisors  
Carroll County Conservation Commission  
Guthrie County Supervisors  
Guthrie County Conservation Commission  
Township Boards of Trustees

### **SERVICE & FELLOWSHIP**

Volunteer Fire Department  
Carroll Count Fair Association  
Volunteer Ambulance/EMT  
CRDG Board (elected by CRDG members)  
CRDG Beautification  
CRDG Enhancement  
CRDG Business      Development  
CRDG Housing  
CRDG Diversity  
CRDG Organization  
Parent-Teacher Organization  
Friends of the Library  
Rotary Club  
Lion's Club  
American Legion Ladies Auxiliary  
American Legion Post 0357  
Gurney Parker  
Sons of the American Legion  
Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of Iowa (invit only)  
Congregate meals  
TTT E0 (by invitation only)  
TTT CU (by invitation only)  
Needle Club I  
Needle Club II  
H & H Club (Star Community)  
Red Hat Club  
Independent Order of Odd Fellows

### **CHURCHES & CHURCH ORGANIZATIONS**

Annunciation Catholic Church  
Annunciation Church –Ladies Guild  
Annunciation Church- Men's Club  
Methodist Church  
Methodist Women's Club  
General Assembly of the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Trinity Lutheran Church (rural)  
Food Pantry Board

### **ADULT HOBBY & SPORTS CLUBS**

Coon Rapids Golf Association  
Book Club  
3 bridge clubs  
Garden Club  
Astronomy Club  
Bowling League, Mens  
Bowling League, Women  
Spanish Club  
Iowa Savings Bank  
Heritage Club  
Weight-watchers (no club currently operating)  
TOPS (weight loss)  
Pheasants Forever

### **YOUTH SPORTS**

CR Swim Team Meets  
CR Little League Football  
Punt Pass & Kick Contests; Spot Shot  
CR Little League Basketball  
CR Little League Baseball/Softball  
CR T-Ball  
CR Youth Flag Football  
Soccer (not school or city)  
CRB Wrestling

### **PRIVATE YOUTH CLASSES**

Kristi Vance Dance  
Piano and voice lessons  
Pottery making  
Horse-back riding lessons

### **YOUTH CLUBS**

4-H  
Girl Scouts  
Boy Scouts

### **HIGHSCHOOL CLUBS\*\***

Spanish Club  
etc

### **VOLUNTEER & NONPROFIT OPPORTUNITIES**

Ecumenical Church Camp  
CR-B Deal Elementary Volunteers  
CR-B Highschool Vounteers  
Thomas Rest Haven Volunteers  
Whiterock Conservancy

Saving Our Avian Resources (SOAR)  
Carroll County Underwater Search and Rescue  
Coon Rapids Independent Living Facility  
Coon Rapids Senior Housing Inc.  
Coon Rapids Bayard Educational Corporation/  
Coon Rapids-Bayard Educational Association  
Charles W Thomas & Bertha L. Thomas Educational Loan Fund  
Garst Education Fund  
Roswell and Elizabeth Garst Foundation

Youth sports are included on this list because their organization usually requires numerous adult volunteers who serve as coaches, assistant coaches, time-keepers, referees, etc. School-sponsored sports are: Football & Wrestling (boys only), Basketball, Track, Cross Country, Baseball (boys only), Softball, Volleyball, Cheerleading. Soccer also occurs during the school year but is organized by an adhoc group sponsored by neither the school nor the city.

The city maintains the Aquatic Center and the Softball and Tennis Courts, and pays coaches for Little League coaches & swim team. Sometimes the city teams get involved in state sponsored contests such as punt pass & kick competition or Spot Shot contest. The City recreation department is run by Laura Hachmeister. Rhonda Rees stores baseball and softball equipment when it is not in use.

The Rec Center is owned by school but rented by city. It used to have an adult volleyball league and a (mixed) basketball league, but volunteers now mostly concentrate on keeping it open for the kids to use on weekends.

Private lessons for children are also listed because these sometimes involve adult volunteers for competitions and shows; and the children may practice and perform together.

### 3. POTENTIAL ECOTOURISM BUSINESSES FOR COON RAPIDS

1. Cross country skiing (trail grooming, ski rentals)
2. Snowmobile racing
3. Wedding planning, flowers, photography
4. Bike rental & repairs
5. Motor sports complex
6. Motocross racing
7. Shooting range
8. Archery range
9. Raising quail and pheasant for field dog trials
10. Petting zoo
11. Pony rides
12. Native prairie seeds and individual plants (Native wildflower garden)
13. Farm tours
14. Hay bale climb
15. Wagon rides
16. Pick your own strawberries or pumpkins
17. Cut your own Christmas Tree
18. Vineyard and wine sales
19. Hunting outfitter
20. Corn maze
21. Corn cob and corn kernel crafts, Corn jewelry
22. Massage & spa
23. Fishing outfitter (to take little kids fishing when their folks don't know how)
24. Paint ball court
25. Antique store
26. Horse drawn wagon or sleigh rides
27. Tractor drawn wagon or sleigh rides
28. Party planning and hosting (Halloween, Harry Potter, pioneer, etc)
29. Homemade furniture
30. Blacksmith shop tour and sales
31. Field dog boarding and training
32. Pet grooming & boarding
33. BMX Bike riding
34. Ice fishing equipment rental
35. Bat house sale (and removal services)
36. Bird house sales (and bluebird walk)
37. Bird-watching classes
38. Nature watching classes & tours
39. Ice skating rental & cocoa sales
40. Hot Air Balloon Rides
41. Picnic basket shop,
42. Catering for outdoor events,
43. RV parking,
44. Tipi rental,
45. Camping cabins,
46. Bed and Breakfast
47. Willow furniture manufacture

#### **4. THIRTY COOL THINGS TO DO IN COON RAPIDS**

- 1 Go fishing at Garst Ponds or at Whiterock
- 2 Play tennis
- 3 Go to Aquatic Center for swimming and waterslide
- 4 Go to water aerobics class
- 5 Eat at Jazzy's Drive-in
- 6 Have the best burger in Carroll County
- 7 Belong to a bowling league
- 8 Win at snooker at South Side
- 9 Play golf
- 10 Order a stained glass window for your home
- 11 Tour a blacksmith shop & free range pig farm
12. Canoe down the river
13. Walk the bike trail
- 14 Go to barn dance at the River House
- 15 Go to New Hope Village Bargain Shoppe
- 16 Buy buffalo and antibiotic free meat
- 17 Visit Garst Farm Khrushchev-visit house
- 18 Go on astronomy tour
- 19 Play bingo on Tuesday nights
- 20 Learn Spanish
- 21 Go hunting
- 22 Find a Geo-cache
- 23 Buy fresh organic vegetables
- 24 Go to Figure 8 races
- 25 Go to fabulous 4<sup>th</sup> of July Fireworks Display
- 26 Go to County Fair
- 27 Go trail riding
- 28 Rent a Gator and drive around the woods
- 29 Find more morel mushrooms than anyone else
- 30 Shoot a wild turkey

## **5. WHITEROCK CONSERVANCY BACKGROUND**

Whiterock Conservancy is a new Iowan nonprofit organization formed in December 2004 to manage an extensive land donation from the Garst Family of Coon Rapids, Iowa.

Between the 1,290 acres donated in 2004 and those in the process of donation (but already being managed by Whiterock) within 5 years the Conservancy will be managing a central preserve of over 4,300 acres, plus some additional outlying acreage located in Audubon and Greene Counties. The total land donation will eventually be over 5,000 acres, with an estimated value of approximately \$6mn.

The central contiguous tract of the preserve starts in the southeast corner of Coon Rapids in southeast Carroll County, and extends 8 miles Southwest into Guthrie County along both sides of the Middle Raccoon River. It comprises timber, pasture, prairie, rare oak savannah and side hill seeps, sandstone outcroppings, and numerous fishing ponds.

When completed, this land gift will be one of the largest ever made in the state of Iowa, and Whiterock will be a jewel in the green crown of Iowa. The project has already earned the commendation of Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack: “A nature preserve of this size will be a tremendous opportunity for Coon Rapids and Guthrie and Carroll Counties, contributing to the economic and environmental diversity of our state. Conservation areas are very important to improving Iowa’s quality of life and making this state a great place to live, work and raise a family. I salute the Garst family for their generosity.”

The lands contains great environmental diversity, and include pasture and limited crop ground (much of which is currently enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program). About one quarter is in timber, and there are also several excellent oak savannah remnants, as well as rare wet prairie along unusual side-hill seeps.

A 2004 plant community survey conducted by Dr. Thomas Rosburg of Drake University found over 4% of the tract in native plants (compared to just 0.5% for the state), and a full quarter of the area in oak forests providing important habitat for neo-tropical migrants and other forest-dwelling birds. Furthermore, Dr. Rosburg found five plants with a “conservatism coefficient” of 10, and 28 plants with a coefficient of 8 or higher. These represent native plants so specialized they flourish only in specific habitats.

Meanwhile Iowa birders have been coming in to the area and have already found numerous rare species including the Long-eared Owl, Trumpeter Swans, Bald Eagles, Blue Herons, Broad-winged Hawks, Cooper’s Hawks, Scarlet Tanagers, Vireos, American Avocets, various warbler species, Bobolinks, and an accidental Vermilion Flycatcher.

Whiterock Conservancy has an innovative mission focused on multipurpose land use. Its primary goal is to preserve and enhance the area’s natural resources through protecting and restoring diverse native habitats, as well as the area’s unusually dark skies. The Conservancy aims to protect and enhance the resources of this river valley from Coon Rapids to Springbrook State Park, located downstream.

Central activities will include the restoration and reconstruction of native prairies and wetlands; more aggressive timber management; and outreach campaigns to area residents,

landowners, and businesses. Planned bird projects include hosting SOAR's Osprey hawk tower and helping to publicize the growing problem of lead poisoning of the area's bald eagle population, due to their ingestion of game containing lead shot and shrapnel.

As a second part of its mission, the Conservancy will engage in research and modeling of ecologically and economically sustainable methods of land management, such as ecotourism, alternative pasturing methods, paid hunting, conservation-friendly farming practices, or harvesting of nontraditional products. In essence, Whiterock will attempt to explore environmentally-friendly ways that conservation lands in Iowa can be made to pay for themselves, thus reducing the temptation of Iowa farmers to row-crop lands that are able to support a much greater plant and wildlife diversity. In five years, Whiterock's top notch leadership has forged the nonprofit into a unique research and conservation education facility, at the forefront of research and experimentation in prairie restoration, multipurpose grazing, and conservation land management. .

The third part of the Whiterock mission is to provide opportunities for low-impact public recreation and environmental education. These options will include hiking, canoeing, bird-watching, nature study, horse-back riding, mountain biking. Whiterock will also promote the limited use of golf-cart type motorized vehicles to enable those unable to walk long distances, to also get out on to the land.

The nonprofit organization Whiterock Conservancy represents an unusual collaborative effort by ISU's Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF), and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Whiterock has as its central purpose to use the land to further these three institutions overlapping missions of land preservation, biodiversity, environmental education, outdoor recreation and sustainable land management.

Since Whiterock legally exists to support the public aims of these three institutions, the Leopold Center, the INHF, and the DNR control the 7-person Whiterock board. The board president is Fred Kirschenmann, director of the Leopold Center; and also serving are the DNR's Mike Brandrup, INHF president Mark Ackelson, and private businessman Robert G. Riley, Jr., of Des Moines. The Garst family has minority representation, with initial board slots held by Liz, Rachel, and Jennifer Garst. T

This quality board is well prepared to offer vision and leadership to this innovative yet authentic hybrid born in the heart of Iowa. Whiterock offers them a land lab to test their theories on site.

Besides the land donation, the Garst Family is also giving Whiterock a modest initial endowment fund, and also donating their small ecotourism business, Garst Farm Resort. This latter gift includes the historic farmhouse (now a B&B) where Roswell Garst once hosted Nikita Khrushchev. Some of its other parts, such as the horse-back riding stables, will probably be subcontracted to local businesses.

The change in ownership of Whiterock lands from the hands of a private family to those of nonprofit land conservancy opens huge new opportunities for the restoration, development and public-use promotion of this land tract. The nonprofit Whiterock will be



able to generate significant support from private, federal, state and local donors to fund restoration, research, education and public-use infrastructure.

With a capacity to draw tens of thousands of visitors a year, and the ability to serve as a central hub and destination area for area bike paths, Whiterock will become an important motor of economic development for the towns of Bayard and Coon Rapids, and the surrounding four counties: 1) Carroll County, where Coon Rapids is located, 2) Greene, the county to its east which just saw the construction of a major hog facility; 3) depressed Guthrie County, where Bayard and most of the Whiterock lands are located, 5) Audubon, an equally depressed neighboring county to the west.

Whiterock has already indicated its interest and commitment to market itself in close coordination with Coon Rapids as well as regional destination areas such as Perry, Manning, Elkhorn, and the Middle Raccoon River Valley bike trail. Rural tourism is a proposition that most flourishes with complementary offers in the regional mix.

As the first step in its new process of opening these lands for public benefit and public use, the Whiterock Board of Directors has retained the services of a Master Planning Consulting Team, headed by Tom Dunbar of Dunbar/Jones, which, among other objectives, will develop a detailed landscape plan for Whiterock Conservancy, and assist in project development for any funds obtained via the Great Places initiative or other sources. This planning process will begin in September 2005 and conclude in the spring of 2006. The services of a professional planning firm will add valuable insight and direction and impetus to the projects developed under this Great Places initiative.

Despite the preliminary nature of Whiterock planning, some central initial needs are already clear. Before Whiterock can market itself to the general public, it needs initial signage, parking, restrooms, and a quick trail overhaul. Medium term, it needs quality educational displays, spread over the whole environment, on valley history, native peoples, early settlers, prairie and wetland restoration, wild bird populations, hunting, etc.. Whiterock also needs at least one well developed short trail loop close to a major access point such as the town and Highway 141. Finally, it needs to quickly move to protect prairie fragments identified in the Rossberg report.

## 6.. LOCAL INVESTMENTS IN MAKING COON RAPIDS-WHITEROCK A GREAT PLACE, 2004-2005

This table lists some of the more significant investments during the last two years.

Donor	Activity	Year	Amount
Thomas Rest Haven & Iowa Savings Bank low interest loan	Thomas Rest Haven remodeling	2005	\$500,000
CRMU	Thomas Rest Haven –new water main & new electrical service	2005	\$15,000
Lang Family and Anonymous	Thomas Rest Haven transport bus & other special projects	2005	\$65,000
Carroll County & City of Coon Rapids	Restoration of Riverside Park	2005	\$2,500 + 400 work hours
City of Coon Rapids	Low/moderate income housing grants	2004-2005	\$33,500
Grant/ Guthrie Co. Conservation/local donors	Highway 141 Canoe access ramp	2004	\$45,000+
Anonymous	Aquatic Center passes for all low-income families	Annual	\$5,000
CRDG, City TIF, CRMU	School Street residential subdivision	2003-2004	\$330,000
CRDG, CRMU, Glidden REC	Docs residential subdivision	2003 -2004	\$220,000
Iowa Living Roadways Grant , CRDG	Native plant enhancement of 5 <sup>th</sup> Ave. gateway	2005	\$17,000
Garst Family	Fishing pond assessment and initial restoration efforts	2004	\$10,000
Garst Family & neighbors	Plant community survey	2004	\$10,000
Garst Family	donation of 1,290 acres of land to Whiterock Conservancy	2004	\$1,617,000
Garst Family	2004 endowment donation to Whiterock Conservancy	2004	\$370,000
Garst Family	donation of 270 acres land to Whiterock Conservancy	2005	\$500,000+
Garst Family	2005 endowment donation to Whiterock Conservancy	2005	\$200,000+
CRMU	High Definition TV introduction	2004	\$30,000
CR Fire Dept./Tall Corn Ethanol	New fire truck and equipment	2004	\$174,000
CR Fire Dept./grant	New fire equipment	2005	\$149,000
Harris Hess	Restoration of historic Main Street bank building	2004-5	Lots
Tim Lee & general public	Annual donation for 4 <sup>th</sup> of July fireworks celebration		\$4,000
City of CR/local donors	Aquatic Center pool cover	2005	\$10,000
City Rec Committee/local donors	Disc golf	2004-2005	\$3,000
County Fair Board	Beachers, lights, etc.	2004-2005	
TOTAL			\$4,300,000+

